DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 681 CS 009 581

TITLE	State Policy and the Higher Literacies. Articles Developed by the Project on Policy and the Higher Literacies. Working Paper No. HL-87-1.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.
PUB DATE	Nov 87
NOTE	50p.; Some articles contain small print. Photographs may not reproduce well.
AVAILABLE FROM	ECS Distribution Center, 1860 Lincoln St., Denver, CO 80295 ($5.00).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - General (020) -- Reports - General (140)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Basic Skills; *Curriculum Development; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Inquiry; *Literacy Education; Reading Skills; Revision (Written Composition); Scientific Literacy; *State Action; Teaching Methods; Textbook Selection; Word Processing; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	Thinking Skills

ABSTRACT

This working paper is a compilation of articles prepared for the Policy and the Higher Literacies Project. The two-year project examines key leverage points in state and local education policy levels and how they may promote or constrict the acquisition of higher levels of literacy for a much broader range of American students. Research strongly suggests a mismatch between stated goals of the American education system and current practice and outcomes. The articles in this paper discuss this apparent mismatch and call for thoughtful reappraisals. Included are: "The Common Agenda: Liberating Undreamed-of Talent" (Governor William Clinton); "Policy Constraints to the Teaching of Thinking" (Robert J. Marzano); "Literacy and Accountability" (Rexford Brown); "New Directions in Statewide Reading Assessment" (Karen Wixson; and others); "Writing in Nebraska" (Joseph E. Lutjeharms; and the Writing Task Force); "The Art of Questioning" (Dennis Palmer Wolf); "Textbook Selection and Curriculum Change" (Roger Farr); "Who is Accountable for 'Thoughtfulness'?" (Rexford Brown); "Higher and Deeper Literacies: Toward More Thoughtful Schools and Students" (Rexford Brown); "New Policy Dilemmas: Minimums versus Visions" (Rexford Brown); "Tests: Serious Limitations on Educational Possibilities" (Vito Perrone); "Higher Literacy Requires Major School Changes" (Rexford Brown); and "Another Endangered Literacy" (Rexford Brown). (RAE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Policy and the
Higher Literacies

ecs working papers

Published by the Education Commission of the States

ED304681

STATE POLICY AND THE HIGHER LITERACIES

Articles developed by the
Project on Policy and the Higher Literacies

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sherry T. Walker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS009581

STATE POLICY AND THE HIGHER LITERACIES

Articles developed by the
Project on Policy and the Higher Literacies

Working Paper No. HL-87-1

November 1987

Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295
303-830-3600

Copies of this book are available for $5 from the ECS Distribution Center, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80295, 303-830-3692. Ask for No. HL-87-1.

Copyright 1987 by the Education Commission of the States.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels. Forty-eight states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS central offices are at 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295. The Washington office is in the Hall of the States, 444 North Capitol Street, Suite 248, Washington, D.C. 20001.

It is the policy of the Education Commission of the States to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

INTRODUCTION

This ECS working paper is a compilation of articles prepared for the Policy and the Higher Literacies Project. The two-year project, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, examines key leverage points in state and local education policy levels and how they may promote or constrict the acquisition of much higher levels of literacy for a much broader range of American students. Our research strongly suggests a mismatch between stated goals of the American education system and current practice and outcomes. The articles in this paper discuss this apparent mismatch and call for thoughtful reappraisals.

THE JOURNAL OF

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Council of State Governments

Volume 60, Number 2 March/April 1987

The Common Agenda: Liberating Undreamed-of Talent

by Governor William Clinton

America is in need of a much more productive economy and education system. We must restructure schools and cultivate the kinds of leadership appropriate to an era of rapid change.

More than two centuries ago, Thomas Jefferson argued that vast potential for genius and leadership lay untapped throughout the world. He called for a more general diffusion of knowledge across Virginia and the other colonies in order to create "an aristocracy of virtue and talent" that would lead the country through its great experiment with democracy.

Then, education was necessary to create an America of our founders' vision. Now, education is necessary to sustain the America which emerged from that vision, an America capable of providing opportunity at home and preserving peace and promoting prosperity around the world. Whether we can meet that challenge is open to question.

Formidable internal and external challenges to our prosperity and position in the world force upon us a common agenda: to unleash the undeveloped, even undreamed-of talents of our people.

As in Jefferson's time, this nation again must recognize that the source of its greatness is its people, and its mission is constantly to find new ways to tap the boundless creative and productive energies of common men and women.

Business, educational and governmental institutions sufficient to meet the needs of the mid-20th Century are no longer sufficient to meet the challenges of the 21st. Low-wage workers with very basic skills and minimal competencies are available in many parts of the world. They are highly motivated, eager to work for wages Americans cannot live on. If comparative labor costs are the determining factor in our competitive position, we are bound to fail.

This nation either must work toward some sort of high-wage, high-technology, innovative economy or ask each succeeding generation to accept a lower standard of living. This process, in fact, began in 1973, when real median income started to decline. Although 9.3 million new jobs were created between 1979 and 1985, 44 percent were at or below the poverty level, twice the percentage of poverty jobs created in the previous six-year period. Between 1981 and 1986, four out of 10 Americans experienced a decline in their real income. This drift cannot be allowed to continue. The only way to stop it is by increasing the efficiency by which we do old things or by finding new things to do which are not yet subject to undercutting by overseas competitors.

Higher Literacies

If business is going to create more appropriate jobs, the people must be there to fill them. A Public Opinion Laboratory study found Americans to be "scientifically illiterate" and most to be only minimally conversant with basic scientific facts, ideas and processes. Recent comparisons of American students' mathematics achievement to that of students in other countries are equally dismaying. So, clearly, schools will need to enable a much larger segment of the population to acquire comprehensive understandings of science, mathematics and technology. Even those citizens who have no interest in being tech-

Gov. Clinton of Arkansas is also Chairman of the Education Commission of the States.

nical workers will have to understand complex technical and scientific issues to make responsive public policy and the kinds of judgments our democracy requires of its citizens today.

A high technology, high-wage economy calls for more than improved mathematics and science achievement; it calls for much higher levels of general literacy, more inquiry skills and more widespread sophistication in reasoning, analyzing and interpreting information. An advanced economy will demand more creativity, more mental flexibility, and more capacity to adapt to rapidly changing work demands and job structures.

Unfortunately, there have been steady declines in the proportion of students demonstrating higher literacy skills such as analytical writing, problem solving, critical thinking, argument, analysis, synthesis, interpretation and evaluation. Most recent reports from the National Assessment of Educational Progress make it clear that although most U.S. students easily meet the lower literacy standards of a generation ago, a majority do not meet today's higher standards and are unlikely to meet tomorrow's. Not only have few students been exhibiting higher literacy skills and habits, researchers also paint a gloomy picture of most schools' capacity to turn the trend around.

A high technology, high-wage economy calls for more than improved mathematics and science achievement; it calls for much higher levels of general literacy, more inquiry skills and more widespread sophistication in reasoning, analyzing and interpreting information.

In his comprehensive study of schooling, John Goodlad found that very few classrooms are conducive to training in and practice of higher-order thinking skills. Teachers monopolize classroom discussion, out-talking entire classrooms of students by a large ratio. Extended discussion, writing and rewriting, debate and all of the ways in which students might develop more sophisticated information processing skills are simply not present in many classrooms. And Goodlad found that even teachers who want to cultivate such skills in their students either do not know how or find themselves constrained by the structural conditions of teaching and schooling.

Paramount among these conditions is the need to control large numbers of restless students in a small space. Other conditions conspire with this management problem to make it difficult for teachers to try innovative programs, spend more than a few minutes on any task, or attend to individual needs that require writing or reduce their dependence on the lecture. Teachers' many noneducational duties absorb time desperately needed for planning complex learning activities and collaboration with colleagues about how the school should be run to achieve its mission. A grasp of how different subjects relate to each other—how mathematics relates to science, for instance, or how both relate to history—is out of the question.

Emphasis on Basics

Most troubling, Goodlad found that to the extent that training in higher-thinking skills appeared anywhere, it appeared in the courses reserved for the college-bound student. Students in general education, vocational education or in low-track courses were being instructed in the basics, very fundamentally defined. These students, disproportionately minorities and disadvantaged children, at risk in many social and educational ways, are subjected to the drill, practice and rote kinds of learning that do not lead to creativity or to any capacity to interpret, analyze, synthesis or solve problems. They are being trained with an industrial model of literacy that will not serve them well in the years ahead in schools that themselves are organized along rigid hierarchical old-fashioned lines.

Like the international challenge, this national challenge is not one we can shirk. Schools are simply going to have to do a much better job of educating students whose backgrounds do not prepare them to be successful students. Instead of weeding them out or doing them in with watered-down courses, schools will have to find new ways to develop their latent talents. Not to address this problem is to acquiesce in the crippling of a large proportion of young people, to drift toward a two-tiered society which has been developing more rapidly in the past five years and to invite a continued increase in the gap between rich and poor in this society.

Second Reform Wave

To meet the challenge before us, education must go through a second wave of reform which goes to the heart of the learning process, focusing on how schools are run, how teachers teach, what students do and what the state requires in the way of regulation, paperwork, etc. To capture the essence of what now needs to be done, education has borrowed a buzz word from corporate America: restructuring.

In education or in business, restructuring may take on different meanings from school to school, but everywhere it means vastly improving pro-

ductivity so that more students stay in school and have much more of what they need to know. It means changes in the system of instruction, better use of time, creating an atmosphere more conducive to learning, integrating technology more efficiently and leading schools more effectively. It means shared decision making at the school level, less bureaucracy and more effective alliances with business and community agencies and with health, welfare and juvenile justice programs.

State policy needs restructuring as well. For decades, policymakers have focused their attention upon minimum standards. That is their duty: to assure the public that its tax-supported institutions are functioning fairly and efficiency.

But there are limits to what we can accomplish with minimums-oriented policies, and their effect upon teachers and administrators may sometimes be to prevent excellence as well as to mandate minimum performance. If state policy for funding programs and certifying teachers discourages innovation, we will not get the experimentation we so desperately need. State leaders have to find policy tools that inspire, rather than deaden, educators; that forge links, rather than create educational fiefdoms; that empower people, rather than enslave them to bureaucratic routine and paperwork.

Changing Obstacles

There are, of course, many obstacles to these kinds of change. State agency and local administrative control patterns are deeply entrenched and there is great, often justified, fear that too much deregulation could lead to falling minimums rather than rising maximums. The system of selecting, training, evaluating and rewarding school leaders seldom encourages both competition and innovation. Entrenched bureaucracies from teacher colleges to administrator groups to teacher unions often fight harder for their turf and their retirement benefits than for more flexible, open, efficient ways of educating children. A powerful inertia grips the system. Many within it have tired of state mandates piled on the already considerable burden of their jobs and have decided to "wait this one out" as they have waited out reforms in the past.

One can try to change a complex system like this through outside pressure and influence, but without the support of people inside the system, not much will happen. On the other hand, people inside the system will never change it radically without the help of policymakers, community leaders, business leaders and others outside the system. The key to success in the next stage of reform is to get people inside and outside the system to work in tandem.

To meet the challenge before us, education must go through a second wave of reform which goes to the heart of the learning process, focusing on how schools are run, how teachers teach, what students do and what the state requires in the way of regulation, paperwork, etc. To capture the essence of what now needs to be done, education has borrowed a buzz word from corporate America: restructuring.

If we are going to tap the vast untapped potential of our workers and our students, it is going to require new kinds of leadership up and down the line. The leadership we need recognizes the permanence of change; the primary importance of people over all other resources; the necessity of reaching out to build communities of purpose within the schools and with business and other allies beyond the schools; and the imperative to restructure the schools as many businesses have, in order to place responsibility where is belongs, so that people closest to the problems have the responsibility to solve them.

If we want to keep the American dream alive for our own people and preserve America's role in the world, we must develop an excellent, continuously changing system for educating and training our people. We have to bring down the barriers to productivity that keep too many people out of the mainstream at a time when we need all of our people to be as productive as possible.

When the 21st Century rolls around, we are either going to look back on this period and say this was a very difficult time for America, but we met the challenge, preserved our role in the world and renewed our progress toward prosperity and peace. Or we will say that we failed, our time passed, and world political and economic leadership passed on to those who were willing to do what we could have done, but chose not to do.

The rest of the world is watching to see whether Jefferson was right. Can our highly diverse, decentralized democracy develop enough of our human potential to meet the test we face? That is the question we will answer. The right answer is not easy, quick or inexpensive. But if we reaffirm the vision of Jefferson, we can preserve the American dream for another generation of Americans.□

Policy Constraints to the Teaching of Thinking

by Robert J. Marzano

Various policy barriers can slow down change. Unless policymakers and educators take a broader view of curriculum and assessment, and unless school leaders stand up to single interest groups, there will be little movement toward better instruction in thinking.

Agreement is spreading nationally that direct instruction in higher-order thinking skills should be a major educational focus. The need for teaching thinking has been highlighted by such prominent education organizations as the College Board,[1] the Education Commission of the States,[2] the American Federation of Teachers and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Concern for the teaching of thinking also is reflected locally. For example, the desire to learn strategies and techniques for the teaching of thinking consistently shows up at the top of the list on surveys of teachers preferences for inservice training.

To meet this demand, researchers and educators have developed a number of programs. For example, Arthur Costa[3] identified more than 30 approaches currently proposed for the teaching of thinking. Given the widespread interest in teaching thinking, and the growing number of programs to satisfy that interest, one would assume that classroom instruction in thinking would be increasingly rapidly. However, this is not the case. Rather, the implementation of thinking-skills programs appears to be a slow and laborious process with many hurdles to overcome if it is to be more than just another "frill" as Carl Bereiter[4] has suggested.

Dr. Marzano is the Director of Research for the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory.

A number of barriers to the implementation of thinking-skills instruction exist—barriers that can and should be addressed in education policies. They include: (1) a narrow view of curriculum, (2) an equally narrow view of assessment and (3) involvement of noneducator groups in pedagogical decisions.

A Narrow View of Curriculum

Barbara Presseisen[5] noted that the most common curricular debate is over which content should be covered—what factual subject matter is essential for students to learn. Unfortunately, an emphasis on teaching factual information is not consistent with the changing nature of society and the effects of that change on the types of knowledge students must possess for success in the "marketplace."[6] Specifically, the student of tomorrow (and, indeed, today) must possess not only factual knowledge but also a broad range of metacognitive and cognitive strategies to process and utilize factual information.

Metacognitive strategies provide learners with an awareness and control of the task. This involves such factors as having a clear goal or subgoal, monitoring progress toward that goal, correcting for ineffective behavior, identifying alternative cognitive strategies and selecting the most effective strategy. While reading, students might ask themselves "What is my purpose? Am I reading for detail or to get the gist of the in-

formation?" Answers to these and similar questions would identify appropriate cognitive strategies. (If reading for detail students might consider underlining or using a colored pen to highlight important facts, for example.)

After selecting the strategy best suited for the task, readers would occasionally remind themselves of the goal and assess the effectiveness of their actions ("Should I pick up my pace since I only have an hour to do this?") When the task was completed, readers would again assess their strategies, identifying learning tactics that might be altered or dropped in the future.

Metacognition also involves knowledge and control of self. Here learners monitor such things as their level of attention and engagement and their attitudes. For example, if students recognize that their attention were waning, they might examine their attitudes about the task. Negative attitudes beget ineffective behavior; positive attitudes provide a climate in which effective behavior can occur. The students would attempt to replace negative attitudes with more positive ones. For example, if the learners thought the task had little value, they might consciously look for something worthwhile in it. If they believed they could not perform the task, they would engage in more positive "self-talk," asserting that they could do the task.

According to Barbara McCombs,[7] the teaching of metacognitive strategies can be an educational breakthrough, providing for some students a vehicle to unlock the previously closed door to learning. Equally as important is direct instruction in cognitive strategies.

These involve: (1) factual or declarative knowledge, (2) process or procedural knowledge and (3) conditional knowledge— when and why a process should be used. Cognitive strategies are fairly specific to a given task. Students working on a mathematics problem, for example, would need to know certain facts relative to the problem—a specific formula, the relationship between certain principles. They would also need to know specific problem-solving procedures, such as working backwards from the answer or breaking the problem into smaller component parts. Finally, the students would need to know when a given procedure was appropriate to use and when it was not.

Recent research[8] indicates that rarely, if at all, do schools provide students with direct instruction in the cognitive or metacognitive strategies necessary to perform academic tasks. Yet such instruction can drastically improve student performance. Instead, content instruction is permeated by an emphasis on factual information. To shift this trend would require a reconceptualization of the curriculum. At its core this is a policy issue. As long as central administrators within school districts and curriculum specialists at the local, state and national levels conceive of curriculum as a list of discrete, content-specific, factual objectives, there is little chance that thinking-skills instruction will become a central part of classroom instruction.

A curriculum that includes the teaching of thinking would necessarily have a balance among factual content, metacognitive and cognitive objectives. Because most schools and districts already have an overwhelming number of objectives devoted to factual content, the incorporation of thinking-skills objectives will probably mean less "coverage" of content. However, given the changing nature and role of content in modern society,[9] less coverage of content in most schools can probably be considered a side benefit of direct instruction in thinking. Most classes are so overloaded with factual information there is little time for anything else. Less content coverage would increase time to teach critical-thinking skills, among other, more useful and meaningful skills.

Recent research indicates that rarely, if at all, do schools provide students with direct instruction in the cognitive or metacognitive strategies necessary to perform academic tasks. Yet such instruction can drastically improve student performance. Instead, content instruction is permeated by an emphasis on factual information.

A Narrow View of Assessment

Closely related to the barrier of a narrow view of curriculum is the view of assessment. In his commissioned study of academic work in schools, Walter Doyle[10] found that accountability drives student/teacher interactions. Once students have reached the middle grades, they tend to take seriously only those tasks for which they are held accountable.[11] If the teacher (and thus the textbook and the standardized test) holds students accountable only for factual-content knowledge, students will focus their attention on learning that information even if metacognitive and cognitive strategies are taught directly and are a formal part of the curriculum. In other words, teachers must not only teach metacognitive and cognitive strategies, they must also assess student competence in these strategies to communicate the message that they are, indeed, valued learning goals. One cannot expect students to

perceive their intrinsic value. Assessment, then, is inexorably linked with instruction because students tend to learn best that on which they are assessed.

Unfortunately, most metacognitive and cognitive strategies do not lend themselves to objective paper/pencil types of assessment. They are most easily assessed through qualitative types of measurement, including unobtrusive and obtrusive observations of students engaged in specific academic tasks. Such techniques are not without precedent in the classroom. In assessing reading competence, Yetta Goodman[12] recommended the use of "kid watching." Students are observed as they use reading materials in some natural setting. The teacher interacts with students to find how they use specific cognitive and metacognitive strategies. He or she also keeps anecdotal records of these interactions, using them to judge student strengths and weaknesses. Assessment, Goodman said, is not something that occurs only at testing time. Rather, it is an ongoing part of the teaching/learning process.

The shift from a narrow view of assessment to a broader perspective is fundamentally a policy issue. Those in positions of authority at the local, state and national levels must issue a clear mandate that assessment techniques should not be comprised primarily of objective, quantitative measures. Instead, more holistic and qualitative measures must be legitimized within education.

In a similar vein, J. C. Campione and A. L. Brown[13] have developed an assessment technique which they refer to as "dynamic assessment." Their technique involves presenting students with gradually more explicit cues for performing a task. The initial hints are very general, the succeeding ones become progressively more specific and more concrete with the last "hint" actually providing a detailed blueprint for generating a correct answer. In this system the metric of learning efficiency is the number of hints required for the attainment of a correct answer.

The use of more qualitative assessment techniques such as these requires a dramatic shift away from viewing assessment as a matter of administering standardized tests to a broader view of assessment as an array of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. According to Walt Haney,[14] such a shift would not at all violate the original intention of standardized tests. Tracing the history and development of testing in this country, Haney painted a picture of gradual reliance on standardized tests as the major criterion measure of performance. As originally intended, however, standardized tests were meant to be used as one of many pieces of data with which to assess student performance. This point is well articulated in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests*, as developed by the American Psychological Association, the American Educational Research Association and the National Council on Measurement in Education:[15]

A test score should be interpreted as an estimate of performance under a given set of conditions. It should not be interpreted as some absolute characteristic of the examinee or as something permanent and generalizable to all other circumstances.

Again, the shift from a narrow view of assessment to a broader perspective is fundamentally a policy issue. Those in positions of authority at the local, state and national levels must issue a clear mandate that assessment techniques should not be comprised primarily of objective, quantitative measures. Instead, more holistic and qualitative measures must be legitimized within education. Similarly, grading criteria should not focus solely on knowledge of factual information but must include performance on specific metacognitive and cognitive strategies.

Involvement of Noneducator Groups in Pedagogical Decisions

The last barrier to the implementation of thinking-skills instruction is rapidly becoming the most severe. Within many thinking-skills programs are found each metacognitive and cognitive strategies as use of affirmations and visualization. Even though these techniques have a strong cognitive research base,[16] they have come under attack from such noneducator groups as the Eagle Forum because of their alleged origin in religions beliefs. Many schools and districts which have field tested and accepted these techniques are adhering to demands to ban the techniques in spite of their proven worth.

Similarly, some noneducator groups have attacked many of the techniques associated with critical thinking. For example, theorists such as Richard Paul[17] consider a dialectic view of the world as essential to critical thinking. He states that students can be taught comprehensive principles of rational thought. They can learn to consider it natural that people differ in their beliefs and points of view, and they can learn to grasp this not as a quaint peculiarity of people but as a tool for learning. They can learn how to learn

from others, even from their objections, contrary perceptions and differing ways of thinking.[18]

To foster dialectic thinking, Paul encourages such classroom practices as:

- Having students attend community meetings or watch television programs on which different viewpoints are expressed;
- Inviting persons with controversial views to speak in classrooms; and
- Having students read literature that reflects values and traditions different from theirs.

Again, these practices, although supported by a rich body of research, are being abandoned by districts because of the objections of various pressure groups.

Stemming this mounting tide of noneducator involvement in pedagogical decisions is clearly another policy issue. Distinctions as to the responsibility of educators versus noneducators must be established and articulated at all policy levels. No doubt this will be a difficult and emotional process in some schools and districts. However, if education is to fulfill its promise, it must be allowed to utilize the resources provided it by the rapidly growing body of research and theory on human cognition without interference from special-interest groups.

Conclusion

The teaching of thinking holds great promise for American education. It is a promise seen by John Dewey when he wrote: "The sole direct path to enduring improvement in the methods of instruction and learning consists in centering upon the conditions which exact, promote and test thinking."[19] Similarly, in 1961, the National Education Association (NEA) envisioned the promise when it stated:

"Thus in the general area of the development of the ability to think, there is a field for new research of the greatest importance. It is essential that those who have responsibility for management and policy determination in education commit themselves to expansion of such research and to the application of the fruits of this research. This is the context in which the significant answers to such issues as educational technology, length of the school year and content of teacher education must be sought and given."[20]

As the NEA citation indicates, the promise of teaching thinking can be realized only if some significant changes are made and defended at the policy level. Immediate actions should be taken in the areas outlined above if thinking-skills instruction is to survive within American education.□

Notes

1. The College Board, *Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able To Do* (New York: CB, 1983).
2. Education Commission of the States, *The Information Society: Are High School Graduates Ready?* (Denver: ECS, 1982).
3. Arthur Costa, ed., *Developing Minds* (Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1985).
4. Carl Bereiter, "How To Keep Thinking Skills From Going the Way of All Frills," *Educational Leadership*, 42:1 (1984), pp. 75-78.
5. Barbara Presseisen, *Thinking Skills Throughout the K-12 Curriculum: A Conceptual Design* (Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools, 1985).
6. John Naisbitt, *Megatrends* (New York: Warner, 1982); and P. Schwartz and J. Ogilvy, *The Emergent Paradigm: Changing Patterns of Thought and Belief* (Menlo Park: Values and Lifestyles Program, 1979).
7. Barbara McCombs, "Processes and Skills Underlying Continuing Intrinsic Motivation to Learn: Toward A Definition of Motivation Skill Training Interventions," *Educational Psychologist*, 19:4 (1984), pp. 199-218.
8. Walter Doyle, "Academic Work," *Review of Educational Research*, 53 (1983), pp. 159-199.
9. See Schwartz and Oglivy.
10. See Doyle.
11. K. Carter and W. Doyle, "Variations in Academic Tasks in High and Average Ability Classes," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, New York (March 1982).
12. Yetta Goodman, "Kid Watching: An Alternative to Testing," *National Elementary School Principal*, 57 (1978), pp. 41-45.
13. J. C. Campione and A. L. Brown, *Dynamic Assessment: One Approach and Some Initial Data* (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois, n.d.).
14. Walt Haney, "Testing Reasoning and Reasoning About Testing," *Review of Educational Research*, 54 (1984), pp. 597-654.
15. American Psychological Association, American Educational Research Association and National Council on Measurement in Education, *Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests* (Washington, D.C.: APA, 1977), Standard J1, pp. 88.
16. A.A. Sheikh, *Imagery: Current Theory, Research and Application* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1983); and D. Meichenbaum, "A Cognitive Behavior Perspective on Intelligence," *Intelligence*, 4 (1980), pp. 271-283.
17. Richard Paul, "Critical Thinking: Fundamental to Education for a Free Society," *Educational Leadership*, 42:1 (1984), pp. 4-14.
18. See Paul, p. 12.
19. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillian, 1916), p. 24.
20. S.C. Rankin, "A Theory of an Isomorphism-Model-Hypothesis Method of Thought," unpublished doctoral dissertation (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University, 1964).

Literacy and Accountability

by Rexford Brown

The current testing and accountability systems in education are out-of-date for today's students and can conflict with efforts toward a richer educational experience for all students.

Many state leaders are calling for a "second wave" of reforms aimed not at improving student performance on the basics, but at creating much higher levels of literacy for a much broader range of students. State and local boards of education are increasingly requiring instruction in such things as "thinking," "critical thinking," "problem solving," "ethics," "inquiry" and "learning to learn." Recently, the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy declared that basic skills and literacies appropriate for the routinized work of early 20th Century mass production are inappropriate for the information-based, high technology, cutting-edge economy now taking shape in the United States.

The forum's report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, calls for "ability to reason and perform complex nonroutine intellectual tasks . . ."; "people with an ability to see patterns of meaning when others see only confusion . . ."; people with a "cultivated creativity . . ."; people who know how to learn all the time and are imbued moreover "with a set of values that enable them to use their skills in the service of the highest goals of larger society."[1]

Such ambitions are not new; statements as lofty have been written in every era of American education. What is new, however, is the assertion that our schools "must graduate the vast majority of their students with achievement levels long thought possible for only the privileged few." That is a tall order for a system based on the assumption that only a few students are capable of developing the most sophisticated levels of literacy and only a few need to be so cultivated.[2]

Dr. Brown is Director of the Policy and the Higher Literacies Project of the Education Commission of the States.

Unfortunately, fewer and fewer students have been exhibiting these higher levels of literacy over the last decade, according to numerous indicators such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress.[3] Moreover, few classrooms or schools lend themselves to training in higher-order literacies.[4] Teachers talk while students listen passively; vigorous discussion and debate are rare. Teachers who want to develop the appropriate skills, habits and dispositions in their students are far too often constrained by the very conditions of teaching. Class time is too short for extended discussion. There are too many students to permit either discussion or much writing. Students are used to being passive and like it that way. Many schools prize quietness over the hubbub of young people solving problems. Control is often more important than education; giving students questions to which there are no easy answers is threatening to teachers who are being evaluated for their success in producing students who can regurgitate facts.

The higher literacies challenge requires policymakers to examine any policies that might support these constraints. Many such policies stem from desires for certain kinds of accountability: minimum competency tests for teachers and students; quantitative indices of time on task, curriculum coverage, and student progress; and elaborate paperwork requirements to satisfy the diverse information needs of elaborate bureaucracies. Many of these accountability policies are "minimums-oriented"—that is, developed to insure the public trust and monitor the investment of billions of public dollars.

The question we face today, however, is whether one can stimulate maximum school performance with minimum standards (and, some would add,

minimum teacher salaries, minimum learning materials, minimum parental involvement and minimum imagination). Here state education policymakers find themselves with little recent experience.

In particular, the higher literacies challenge poses some interesting dilemmas for state and district testing programs. To begin with, if higher literacies instruction requires students to develop new habits and dispositions through more critical thinking, more problem solving, more reading and extended writing, then schools will need new kinds of tests. They cannot assess these more complex activities with the current standardized, multiple-choice, norm-referenced commercial tests so widely used to gauge school progress. More appropriate are open-ended kinds of questions and tasks, interviews, observations and a wide variety of school-based and nonschool-based approaches to evaluation.

These, however, appear to present many problems. They may be more time-consuming and more difficult to carry out fairly and efficiently. Do we know enough about something such as problem solving to develop dependable instruments? Can higher literacies tests be objectively scored? What about their reliability and validity? Higher literacies evaluations that require essays or performance or portfolios or group work or contextual observation do not lend themselves to the quantification necessary to report progress to parents, school boards and newspapers. They appear far more costly than machine-scored tests, and of great concern to policymakers, they seem to defy standardization. We rely upon standardization to ensure fairness, keep testing costs low and permit statistical comparisons useful for planning and policy making.

A second set of problems occur with respect to the influence of testing on teaching. To the extent that the scores on commercial, standardized tests are used to put pressure on schools, both teaching and curriculum tend to emphasize what can be tested in these simple formats. A learning environment designed to produce success on multiple-choice tests is not a learning environment conducive to instruction in higher literacies.

Presumably, higher literacies evaluations such as those discussed above would force many teachers to educate students rather than prepare them for multiple-choice tests. (The difference is clear wherever essay examinations have replaced multiple-choice tests of grammar and usage; the latter can be dealt with through drill and memorization, but essay exams require teaching students how to write.) However, if teachers and schools began to create the appropriate learning environments, we might again lose that capacity to standardize that seems crucial to accountability. Higher literacies environments and tests are often "open-ended"; neither teacher nor student necessarily knows where an inquiry will lead, what will happen along the way, how long it will take, what course of action is preferable or what a "correct answer" might be. What happens to curricular mandates under such circumstances? What happens to textbooks and their accompanying tests? How can a principal or parent evaluate two science teachers who have gone off on entirely different paths?

The more kinds of performance data we want and the more comparisons we want to make objectively and efficiently, the more we require standardized tests. On the other hand, the more we move toward the climates and behaviors conducive to acquisition of higher literacies, the lower our capacity to standardize, measure and easily describe educational progress.

If accountability measures moved in the directions suggested by higher literacies goals and if teachers thereupon followed the lead to create more appropriate learning environments, what would happen to school organization, management and leadership? Structural changes would most likely be idiosyncratic, threatening the standardization of background factors that help planners and policymakers interpret test results.

Our dilemma should now be clear: The more kinds of performance data we want and the more comparisons we want to make objectively and efficiently, the more we require standardized tests. On the other hand, the more we move toward the climates and behaviors conducive to acquisition of higher literacies, the lower our capacity to standardize, measure and easily describe educational progress.

There is, then, a tension between three different policy imperatives: to promote better education for all students, to measure progress toward that goal and to hold public servants accountable for their roles in that progress. If the conditions necessary for carrying out the second and third imperatives undercut the first, the game is over.

Getting Out of the Bind

Testing and assessment people should be asking a number of questions about their programs these days. They should determine first of all the extent of accountability demands stemming from

state and local laws, mandates, rules and regulations. There could be considerably more going on than any one person in the system knows about, especially if one includes commercial standardized tests, minimum competency tests, state assessments, teacher and principal certification exams, teacher competency tests, SATs and ACTs (wrongly) used as outcomes measures and all paperwork associated with these and with other compliance measures. Three questions are critical:

- How much is all this costing the taxpayer and are the costs worth the benefits (i.e., the publicity and the capacity to say people are being held accountable)?
- How much teacher preparation time and direct teaching time is consumed by accountability demands and their associated paperwork?
- How much student learning time is intruded upon by accountability tests and assessment not directly related to what students are studying?

Teachers who want to develop the appropriate skills, habits and dispositions in their students are far too often constrained by the very conditions of teaching. Class time is too short for extended discussion. There are too many students to permit either discussion or much writing.

- Research being conducted at the Education Commission of the States suggests that most state and district testing people and policymakers do not have sufficient data to answer those questions. In fact, although tens of millions of dollars are spent every year on testing, assessment and accountability measures, there is little hard evidence that any of it has had either positive or negative impacts upon educational quality. Testing critics charge that great damage has been done, but they do not separate out of the various potential causes of that damage and have few empirical studies to cite.[5] Test and assessment directors, on the other hand, bemoan the fact that they can find little evidence that their tests influence anyone at all. "Most of our information never gets used," the director of a major state assessment told me recently. "When we asked districts what kind of help we could give them, a majority said they want to learn how to use test data. They don't know how right now."

Research bears out this observation. Leslie Salmon-Cox and other researchers discovered in several studies that each actor in the system thinks someone else is using the test data, even though he or she is not.[6] Teachers do not need commercially prepared tests to tell them which of their students are faring poorly, but they think principals need the results. Principals say they don't use the data, but teachers and central administrators need them. Central administrators say they don't do much with the tests results, but they believe principals and teachers use them heavily! The only people everyone agrees are using test data are newspaper editorial writers, school board candidates and people so distant from the schools they have no idea what the results might mean.

The first step out of the testing/higher literacy dilemma, then, is to find out what kinds of accountability demands are in place, how much time and money they consume and how or whether the data are being used intelligently. The second step is to find out whether accountability demands actually have an impact on teaching, learning and curriculum. Specifically, we should ask:

- Do teachers "teach to the test" at the expense of other teaching possibilities?
- If the answer is yes, what kind of teachers teach to the test, under what conditions and with what results for their students? Would these teachers be capable of higher literacy instruction if they were not teaching to the test?
- Do standardized tests influence teachers' ideas about good testing? That is, do teachers tend to model their own tests on the formats and assumptions of standardized tests?
- Do high-stake tests, such as state-mandated competency exams, force teachers to narrow the curriculum to what can be tested with standardized multiple-choice tests?
- Do high-stake tests influence students to disregard material that is not going to be tested?
- Do accountability demands discourage risk-taking or experimentation in either teaching or curriculum?

There is overwhelming anecdotal evidence (supported by common sense) that many teachers "teach to the test" when the stakes for them or for their school are high enough. And if the test is reductive, focused primarily upon recall of facts and limited only to what can be most easily measured, then it follows that instruction—at least while teaching to the test is taking place—will be reductive, narrowly focused and fact based.

As the saying goes among teachers, "What's inspected becomes what is expected." Many teachers and students alike reason that if they are not going to be evaluated on something, there is no point in teaching or learning it. We might guess that the poorer teachers act this way and that excellent teachers do not. But again there is very little hard data to go on.

So strong is the presumption that teachers will teach to the test that in some districts and states that axiom has become the primarily rationale for creating more innovative and challenging tests. The Pittsburgh Public Schools, for example, have been developing a higher-order of thinking skills assessment knowing full well that when teachers try to teach to it, they will be forced to alter their instruction for the better. The same thinking undergirds assessment activities in Connecticut, California and Michigan. Objectives for the upcoming Michigan reading assessment (discussed elsewhere in this issue) are being circulated far in advance of the actual assessment in hopes of stimulating new thinking about the nature of reading instruction and nudging people to begin to change their programs so they will not be embarrassed when the assessment comes around. This strategy, however, does not have uniform results. In a survey of Michigan school districts last year, opinion was about evenly divided with respect to whether the assessment represented an impetus for change and a guidance for change or whether they resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum and political exploitation.

Several school districts in California have devised tests in various subject areas that encourage more curricular innovation and teacher creativity. The Mountain View-Los Altos School District near San Francisco has developed a writing sample and tests in biology and U.S. history that encourage teachers to be more creative. The San Juan and Conejos Valley School Districts both employ the Golden State Assessment, which includes many items designed to assess higher-thinking skills and problem solving. However, just as we have little hard data about the negative effects of simplistic tests upon teaching and curriculum, we have little hard data about the positive effects of more challenging tests.

Having satisfactorily answered questions about the impact of current accountability measures, policymakers will be able to move in new directions. Two further endeavors necessary to lessen the conflict between current accountability systems and the need for higher literacies are more flexible notions about the nature of accountability and incentives to develop new tests and test procedures more conducive to higher literacies education.

It may help to demystify school accountability systems by acknowledging that they are just management systems. Corporations revise management systems all the time as they grow and change; at particular points in a company's life a merit system that forces staff competition may be the best approach; at another time a team building system might be best. Hierarchical systems dependent upon exhaustive financial analyses were popular in the 1950s and 1960s; the 1980s appear to favor horizontal management, empowerment and corporate culture. If the rest of the world can adopt new management systems, there is no reason in principle that schools cannot.

Key to a good management system is that it is fair; that it rests upon the most important and relevant information; that it is supportive of overall goals; that it does not consume more resources than it is worth; that everyone learns from it; and that the people closest to various problems get the information they need to solve those problems.

School accountability systems can get bogged down when people connect fairness to objectivity in too rigid a way. One can be perfectly fair without being "objective" in the scientific sense. If we did not believe that, we would have a very different legal system. The quest for precision and objectivity in matters when human judgment is more appropriate and accurate can turn the noblest of intentions into the most nonsensical programs, especially in bureaucratic environments. And policymakers should never do anything that encourages bureaucrats to be more bureaucratic than they already are! Accountability means nothing if the measures used to establish it have nothing to do with the enterprise being managed. Good managers want relevant information. As more and more policymakers want to know more about the true quality of education, current indicators will become increasingly useless. The best hedge against this mismatch is a broad set of robust indicators and relentless effort to prune out data that do not get used. State policymakers could create incentives and rewards for managers who succeed in targeting and streamlining these systems.

Most importantly, an efficient management system provides each actor with the information (and only that information) he or she needs to do the job well. Teachers need certain kinds of diagnostic information about individual students. Principals need information about individual teachers, groups of teachers and groups of students. Central office administrators need unique kinds of information about schools, and state policymakers yet another set of needs. No one test or assessment can meet all of these needs. A true accountability system holds each actor responsible for what he or she contributes to the enterprise. To be sure, one needs student performance data of various kinds; but one also needs data about how well principals, superintendents, counselors, school board members and others are doing their particular jobs outside the classroom.

If we start from this principle, we get a much more flexible set of possibilities. There is really no need for the state to collect data on every

student, for instance. State policymaking does not require that much detail (which is probably why so little of it gets used). States can sample schools and students sufficiently to monitor broad trends. Large districts, too, can sample or extrapolate trends from the all-pupil tests administered in schools.

Districts and school have several ways of dealing with their simultaneous needs for standardization and greater individualization of tests to keep pace with innovation. One approach is to specify certain core indicators and require that, say, only 50 percent of each school's information to be tied to the indicators. The other 50 percent could be relevant information as defined and measured by the schools and their communities in whatever way they think most appropriate. The state can help in this by providing workshops and technical assistance for districts that want to move ahead in this area.

Another approach is to take advantage of emerging test construction theory that promises ways of ranking different performance tasks on the same scale. Because this kind of effort is pretty sophisticated, state help would again be necessary. The payoff, however, would be great: teachers and schools could feel free to experiment and pioneer new ways to assess complex skills and behaviors without fear of inappropriate test score pressures.

There are, in fact, numerous ways to assess behaviors such as curiosity, love of reading, problem solving, analysis and other higher literacy indicators. The best strategy for validating, replicating and spreading such measures is a two-fold, top-down and bottom-up one. The state should take the lead in setting goals for achievement that cannot be measured with current commercial standardized tests. It should then challenge both its own assessment people and schools and teachers to come up with efficient indicators.

For their part, teachers should be relentless in their efforts to force accountability testing to move off the safe shores of basic skills and into deeper waters of comprehensive education. Teachers know talent when they see it, and they know successful learning when they see it. They are not, however, well-schooled in methods of translating those recognitions into comprehensive evaluation programs. In the last analysis, this is what state policy will have to help them achieve. Once more teachers—like other professionals—become involved in setting and policing their own standards, their own assessment skills should improve. A teaching force in which there is strong public confidence and a teaching force no longer dependent upon outsiders for information about it accomplishments will go a long way toward resolving the dilemmas we face today.□

Notes

1. Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, May 1986).

2. Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985); and William Chance, *". . . the best of educations": Reforming American's Public Schools in the 1980s* (Chicago: The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, 1987).

3. National Assessment of Educational Progress, *Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults* (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1986); and R. Venezky et al., The Subtle Danger (Princeton: ETS, 1987).

4. John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School: Prospect for the Future* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984).

5. Rexford, Brown, *Searching for the Truth About Truth in Testing Legislation* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1980).

6. L. Salmon-Cox, "Teachers and Standardized Achievement Tests: What's Really Happening?", *Phi Delta Kappan*, 62 (1981) pp. 631-634.; and L. Sproull and D. Zubrow, "Standardized Testing from the Administrative Perspective," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 62 (1981), pp. 628-631.

New Directions in Statewide Reading Assessment

by Karen Wixson, Charles W. Peters,
Elaine M. Weber and Edward D. Roeber

The Michigan state reading assessment lays out a salutary example of how states can use their testing programs to encourage innovation in teaching and curriculum.

Editor's Note:

In the effort to improve schools, Michigan has been tackling one of the most frequently cited problems of American education—lack of critical reading skills. A new definition of reading is affecting every area of educational practice, including policymaking, assessment, instruction and teacher training.

In 1983, a joint committee of the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and the Michigan Reading Association (MRA) developed a "new" definition of reading. It had become clear in a review of reading objectives that the existing definition did not reflect current research and theory. It implied that reading is a static process, comprised of a series of sequential and hierarchical skills.

Current theory views reading as a dynamic process in which the reader is an active participant. Readers derive meaning from the printed word based on what they bring to the reading situation in terms of experience, knowledge, skills and ability; how the information is presented in the text; and what effect context has. The new definition views or describes reading as an "interactive" process, not one in which the reader is passive.[1]

"As a result, difficulty is no longer viewed as an absolute property of a particular reading skill or task, but rather as a relative property of the interaction among specific reading, text and instructional factors . . ." says the position paper developed by MRA.[2] "This new definition recognizes that reading skill will vary from situation to situation, and that skilled reading is the ability to tailor one's activities to the demands of each reading situation. Thus, within this context, skills are viewed as a means to an end, rather than an end unto themselves."

The MDE/MRA committee translated the new definition into a set of instructional objectives. After a period of review, including conference presentations, regional meetings and questionnaires designed to obtain feedback from as many people as possible, the State Board of Education approved new "Essential Goals and Objectives for Reading Education" in the spring of 1986.

A Good Reader

The new reading objectives describe the characteristics of a good reader as outlined by recent reading research. This is in sharp contrast to the list of component skills provided by the previous objectives. The new ones are organized into three major categories: constructing meaning, knowledge about reading and attitudes, and self-perceptions.

Dr. Wixson is an Associate Professor of Education, University of Michigan. Dr. Peters is a Consultant, Secondary Reading, Oakland Intermediate School District. Dr. Weber is a Reading Consultant, Michigan Department of Education. Dr. Roeber is the Supervisor, Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

First, good readers must be able to integrate their knowledge and skills as they decipher meaning for different texts under a variety of reading conditions. Second, good readers must have knowledge about the various purposes for reading, about how different reader, text and contextual factors can influence their reading, and about the skills and strategies they can use in their reading. Third, good readers are those who have developed positive attitudes about reading and positive perceptions about themselves as readers. Changes in the reading definition and objectives obviously must be accompanied by changes in assessment, instruction and professional development of teachers.

Current theory views reading as a dynamic process in which the reader is an active participant. Readers derive meaning from the printed word based on what they bring to the reading situation in terms of experience, knowledge, skills and ability; how the information is presented in the text; and what effect context has.

Following development of the objectives, the MDE recognized that it next needed a plan for how the new objectives could be measured by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). It contracted with MRA to draw up a test blueprint. The blueprint specifies that the new objectives require tests that evaluate reading on a more holistic manner than the current MEAP tests. This means there will no longer be a one-to-one correspondence between each objective and individual test items. Rather, groups of test items will correspond to the categories of the new objectives. In addition, there will be "topic familiarity" items to assess students' background knowledge of the topics and ideas that are central to their understanding of the reading passages used on the texts.

The topic familiarity part will be administered first, followed by three reading selections containing between 25 and 30 items each. Those passages will be representative of the materials students are likely to encounter in their classrooms—full-length stories and subject-area texts taken from materials such as children's magazines, literature anthologies and textbooks. The readability of the reading selections is determined on the basis of factors such as how well the text is structured, its literary merit, the use of adjunct aids such as headings, charts and illustrations and the consistency of the text with the domain of knowledge it represents. This is in sharp contrast to the short, choppy passages and readability formulae that are used traditionally with reading tests.

About half of the items following each passage will be designed to evaluate students' ability to understand both narrative and informational texts. About 30 percent will test their knowledge of how the reader, text and context influence their comprehension. The remaining 20 percent of the items are a standard set of attitude and self-perception questions asked in relation to each reading selection. Students will be queried about their interest in the passage, how difficult the passage and the questions are and how well they think they understood the passage and questions. The topic familiarity items will evaluate students' understanding of the concepts that are important to the comprehension of the reading selections.

Finally, the blueprint also calls for new methods to report the results of the new tests. Because results no longer can be reported separately for each objective, it is likely the results will be reported in ways that describe a reader's performance under specified reading conditions, such as level of topic familiarity or interest in the text. The new MEAP reading tests are scheduled for implementation in the schools in the fall of 1989, pending the results of pilot testing and final approval of the state Board of Education.

Decision Making

In addition to new assessments, teachers must have a full understanding of how the reconceptualization of reading affects instructional decision making. Teachers must be able to identify: (1) *what*—the nature of the materials the student is reading (poem, short story, etc.) and the information to be learned (concepts, facts, literary themes); (2) *why*—the purpose for which the student is reading (enjoyment, to write a report, etc.); and (3) *how*—the skills and strategies the reader must use to perform the assigned task (to skim, to categorize, etc.). For example, if teachers were planning a unit on the American Revolution, they would have to identify the content to be learned, the variety of materials to be read, the purposes for reading and the strategies or skills needed to complete the required tasks.

It is difficult to be precise about the conditions that made the Michigan project possible. Events at the national level, however, when the Michigan project began in 1982-83, helped create a political climate that was amenable to such change. The message these reports delivered to the nation was that there was an urgent need to improve the quality of our educational system in general, and literary learning in particular.

Another less-well-known result of the national reports was an increased recognition of the contribution research can make to educational reform. As educational decision makers struggled with how to implement the recommendations of the reports, research on critical elements of the educational process became more valuable. The increased acceptance of researchers as "translators" made it easier for them to become involved in the conceptualization of the Michigan project. In addition, the report of the National Institute of Education's Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers,* provided national support for Michigan's reconceptualization of reading assessment and instruction.[3]

The national reports also resulted in the establishment of many state task forces to tackle the problem of educational reform, and Michigan was no exception. The state board's "Blueprint for Action" document enabled the MDE to form a curriculum review committee of teachers, administrators and university reading educators that has been instrumental in the development of the reading project.[4] This committee developed a review process for districts to use with their reading curricula and a consistent format for presenting the new definition of reading and the accompanying research. These were shared with more than 3,500 Michigan educators in a series of regional sessions held during 1984 and 1985 to disseminate information about the project and receive feedback from large numbers of people.

Lots of Time

In addition, the curriculum review committee prepared a document on research and the classroom teacher which has been distributed to more than 21,000 people since 1984. But perhaps the most important factor at the state level has been generous amount of time that the state Board of Education and MDE have allowed for the completion of this project. The state recognized the importance of using research in the development and implementation of education policy and has willingly provided the time necessary to accomplish this goal. Also, because the state has many years of experience in developing new tests and because there is a test already in place, there is not the same time pressure to complete the new tests that may exist in states that are developing a mandated testing program for the first time.

The support of the MRA has been a critical factor in the development of the project. An affiliate of the International Reading Association, MRA acts as the official representative of reading professionals within the state. It has served as the vehicle through which all interested parties have come together to work on the project.

The significance of the Michigan project is that it illustrates a number of very important points about how state government can influence educational change in a very positive way. By adopting a view of reading that shifts the focus of assessment from a minimalist perspective to one that requires a higher level of integration of information, Michigan was able to raise important questions about the reading curriculum. Thus, the new definition provides a framework that necessitates an adherence to a higher level of literacy by focusing on the interactive nature of the reading process.

Therefore, MDE recognized that in order to move curriculum development in a more positive direction, it would need to develop an assessment test that was more consistent with current research and practice. To do this required those in leadership roles within the state government to perceive themselves as leaders and innovators who could work in a collaborative manner with other professional agencies within the state to bring about the needed changes.

Portions reprinted with permission of *The Reading Teacher.*

Notes

1. Karen K. Wixson and Charles W. Peters, "Reading Redefined: A Michigan Reading Association Position Paper," *The Michigan Reading Journal,* 17 (1984), pp. 4-7.
2. See Wixson and Peters.
3. Richard C. Anderson, Elfrieda H. Hiebert, Judith A. Scott and Ian A.G. Wilkerson, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of The Commission on Reading,* (Washington, D.C.: The National Institute of Education, 1985).
4. *Better Education for Michigan Citizens: A Blueprint for Action* (Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State Board of Education, January 1984).

Additional References

1. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).
2. *A Summary of Major Reports on Education* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1983).
3. Roger Farr and Robert F. Carey, *Reading: What Can Be Measured?,* 2nd ed. (Newark, Del: International Reading Association, 1986).
4. *Governor's Educational Summit Task Force Report* (Lansing, Mich., December 1984).
5. Michael L. Kamil, "Current Traditions of Reading Research," *Handbook of Reading Research,* ed. by P. David Pearson (New York: Longman, 1984).
6. Peter N. Winograd, "Context of Literacy: Translating Research into Policy," *Contexts of School-Based Literacy,* ed. by Taffy E. Raphael (New York: Random House, 1986).

Writing in Nebraska

by Joseph E. Lutjeharms and The Writing Task Force

Nebraska provides an example of a state board of education trying to get out front on an innovative writing program that will require new assessment measures. The board hopes that innovative policy recommendations to teachers, policymakers, administrators and other leaders will improve students' writing skills.

In the mid-1970s, two events occurred which were to have far-ranging effects on writing instruction. *Newsweek*, in an article on "Why Johnny Can't Write," proclaimed for all what a number of people have been muttering for some time: A writing crisis was at hand. In addition, the University of California at Berkeley invited successful elementary and secondary writing teachers to participate in a summer workshop to share techniques with one another. That workshop grew into the Bay Area Writing Project and ultimately into the National Writing Project (NWP), an effort that has transformed writing instructions and learning in thousands of classrooms across the nation.

This concern about the writing abilities of America's students has resulted in a marked increase in the amount of money and time devoted to research in writing. More research on writing instruction was conducted in the past decade than in the preceding century. Much of it agreed on the approaches that make a difference in writing skills and identified shortcomings of many traditional patterns of writing instruction.

As a result of the research conducted and of the growth of the NWP and dissemination of its practices, we have today a better grasp of what works and what does not. The research, however, has not been widely applied in classrooms. In some, students are writing more than ever before, they are enjoying doing so, and they are writing better. But this is not the case in all classrooms—not even in most. The 1984 National Assessment of Educational Progress measured writing abilities of America's 4th-, 8th- and 11th-graders. Although some gains were noted since the first assessment in 1974, the overall tone of the report was disappointing:

> Analytic writing was difficult for students in all grades. Even on the easiest task . . . only 25 percent of the 11th-graders, 18 percent of the eighth-graders, and 2 percent of the fourth-graders wrote adequate or better analysis . . . . In persuasive writing, students had difficulty providing evidence for their points of view. Fewer than one-third . . . wrote responses judged adequate or better . . . . A major conclusion to draw from this assessment is that students at all grade levels are deficient in higher-order thinking skills.

Mr. Lutjeharms is Commissioner of Education in Nebraska. The Writing Task Force includes Roger Breed, superintendent, Axtell Public Schools, chairman; Robert Doxtator, director, Nebraska Writing Project, Chadron State College; Max Larsen, president, State Board of Education; David Martin, president, Nebraska Council of Teachers of English; Rex Filmer, English consultant, Nebraska Department of Education; Gerry Brookes, director, Nebraska Writing Project, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Jack Hallstrom, principal, Northwest High School, Omaha; Therese Logue, principal, Laurel-Concord High School, Laurel; and Francis Reinehr, teacher, Hawthorne Elementary School, Lincoln.

New Directions

Recent research points to teaching methods to overcome such writing deficiencies in our students. While it is an over-simplification to apply the phrase "process approach" to all the changes occurring in writing instruction, it does describe a significant portion of current thought and practice. The term grew from research that centered on what writers do rather than upon what writing is. Researchers found that most writing results from a series of stages variously described as pre-writing, drafting, revising and publishing. These stages may well be recursive; that is, one may revert to pre-writing activities while drafting and may also revise in the drafting stage.

That recursiveness is common in much writing activity is important to realize, for traditionally writing is viewed—and student writers are taught—that writing is linear. That is, the writer begins with individual words, puts them together to form sentences, links sentences to form paragraphs, and so on. If words are spelled correctly, sentences are formed correctly, paragraphs are indented and organized around one idea and ordered so their relationships to one another and to the overall purpose is clear, then the writing is successful. The process approach does not eliminate this attention to correctness of its product, but places it near the end rather than the beginning of writing concerns.

Research also indicates that writing develops more quickly—and skills are learned more permanently—when children first write and then the teacher reacts by helping the author with the skills necessary to revise the writing. The classroom changes when this approach—Write-Teach—is used as opposed to the traditional Teach-Write method. The content of the course is not the set of rules and skills presented and demonstrated by the teacher, but rather what the students generate in their writing. The teacher does not lecture or demonstrate a series of skills for the whole class. Instead, the teacher circulates among writers, converses with individuals about their writing, asks questions, makes suggestions and answers questions.

The classroom becomes a writing laboratory in which experimentation is encouraged and rewarded. Writing is shared among students, and between students and teachers who write, too. Most writing is published in this classroom, displayed on bulletin boards, bound into "books," read aloud; it is, in short, used as writing is used elsewhere: to communicate.

A premium is placed upon teacher time in such classrooms, because most instruction occurs in short individual conferences between teacher and writer or between the teacher and small groups of writers sharing the same problems. It is entirely possible for teachers to lecture to 30 or more students; it is difficult, if not impossible, to conduct a writing laboratory for that number.

Research also has found that the primary method of teaching writing—the concentration on formal grammar—does not improve writing, and in fact, may prevent improvement because it takes time away from effective teaching and writing practice. Although this seems to contradict what many associate with learning to write and to question the contents of most composition textbooks, the finding is not new. For 80 years, studies have constantly demonstrated that the study of formal grammar does not improve writing. One researcher found that "in some studies a heavy emphasis on mechanics and usage (e.g., marking every error) resulted in significant losses in overall quality. School boards, administrators and teachers who impose the systematic study of traditional school grammar on their students over lengthy periods of time in the name of teaching writing do them a gross disservice which should not be tolerated by anyone concerned with the effective teaching of good writing."

Research also indicates that writing develops more quickly—and skills are learned more permanently—when children first write and then the teacher reacts by helping the author with the skills necessary to revise the writing.

Nebraska's Efforts

Against the background of a national "writing crisis," coupled with the additional research that surfaced over the past decade, the Nebraska State Board of Education authorized in April 1986 the creation of a task force to study writing instruction and learning in the state and to make recommendations about what the state could do "to ensure that Nebraska's students receive effective instruction and adequate opportunities to develop writing abilities."

The task force reviewed the recent research in writing instruction and surveyed school administrators, English/language arts teachers and students about writing practice. It found that less than half the districts have a written plan for a district wide writing program. Less than 40 percent employ an evaluation plan to measure the outcomes of writing programs, and of those that do, more than one-third use norm-referenced instruments which test discrete proofreading skills without asking students to write.

Workbooks and grammar study dominate writing instruction in Nebraska elementary schools. Fewer than 30 minutes per day are provided for students to practice writing in the majority of the schools. Most of that time is spent in practicing such discrete syntactic units as sentences and paragraphs, with less than half of writing time devoted to writing complete units of discourse such as letters, stories, and poems. About 35 percent of elementary students believe that correct spelling is the most important part of writing, and more than 60 percent report that they talk to a teacher about their writing only "sometimes" or "seldom or never." Only 25 percent report using a computer "sometimes" to write.

Research also has found that the primary method of teaching writing–the concentration or formal grammar–does not improve writing, and in fact, may prevent improvement because it takes time away from effective teaching and writing practice.

The picture is not much different in the state's secondary schools. English teachers report that writing is taught in all their classes, but they require their students to write at least one paragraph two or fewer times per week. Grammar, usage and mechanics occupy a significant part of writing instruction in many schools: 45 percent of responding teachers said that at least half of the class time is spend studying these topics. Furthermore, teachers hold conferences with individual student writers fewer than four times per semester, and 65 percent of secondary school students say they never use a word processor to write.

The Uses of Writing

The structure of most writing courses we examined contradicts much of what research shows to be effective. For example, schools often fail to recognize the primary purpose of writing—to communicate. This purpose is frequently absent because much of school writing is a form of testing. A certain amount of evaluation is necessary, of course, but if all school writing is a form of testing, then students can really not be held at fault if they come to dislike writing or if they copy, paraphrase or plagiarize instead of developing their own distinct writing "voice." We know that when students are in control of their writing for a particular audience, they write better than when they are addressing an examiner. As students progress through the grades, however, more and more of their writing is addressed to the teacher in the role of examiner, as much as 80 percent or more in the upper grades. The result is that writers have little experience in writing to a variety of audiences. They write primarily in third person, thus having little opportunity to develop their own writing voice, and their attitudes about writing tend to be negative.

Evaluation

The standardized, or norm-referenced, test—so popular in the schools—also is an inappropriate measure of writing achievement or growth. While such tests may be predictive of success in school or college and can be administered or scored efficiently, they do not yield useful information about an individual's writing ability. Such tests do not measure performance on such important tasks as generating ideas, elaborating and organizing, and finding a sense of audience.

Students must write, and that writing must be evaluated in consistent and valid ways. Two types of direct measures—holistic and primary trait analysis—may be employed. When teachers use holistic scoring, they read each paper for overall quality and assign it a score. Primary trait analysis yields more specific information about each student's abilities. Once the writing assignment has been decided upon, teachers identify traits of a paper that respond successfully to assignments. Because primary trait scoring yields more information about each student, it is more time-consuming to score and more expensive to administer. Thus, it is more suited for small groups, while holistic scoring is more appropriate for large groups. Both are more useful to the school than standardized tests, however.

Textbooks

Composition textbooks, by and large, have perpetuated traditional approaches to writing instruction. Long on mechanics and grammar and short on opportunities for students to write, textbooks have served the teacher who has little experience or confidence in teaching writing. They have not served students. Although newer textbooks devote more attention to process writing, schools evaluating textbooks for adoption should develop their selection criteria very carefully. Do texts consistently take control away from the writer by suggesting topics or employing story starters, or do they encourage writers to select

topics from their own experiences and to discuss writing ideas with peers? Do they suggest peer editing and provide help for editors? Do they emphasize the concept of drafting and revising? Do they, in short, attempt to assist the teacher in the direct teaching of problem-solving strategies throughout the stages of the writing process, or do they substitute grammar and mechanics drills for writing?

Word Processing

The word processor can make writing less difficult; revision is so simplified that it becomes almost pleasurable. The paper is neat and professional in appearance, but a number of teachers have reservations. They worry that using word processors will impair the development of penmanship skills, that spell-checkers will reduce students' spelling performance, and that some students may come to rely so heavily upon a computer that they will be unable to write when one is unavailable.

A more legitimate concern is the question of keyboarding skills. The pervasiveness of computers and their ever-expanding promise as an educational tool argue strongly for keyboarding to be taught in the elementary grades, a practice many schools have already introduced. Spell-checkers do not automatically correct misspellings, and until such time as every student desk is equipped with a computer, students will continue to employ pens and pencils and to practice penmanship.

Early results of employing word processing in writing programs argue for expansion of the effort. Students tend to become more fluent, to write longer papers, and to write more frequently. Understandably, they revise more frequently and more extensively. Perhaps most importantly, students develop more positive attitudes about writing and about themselves as writers.

Resources

An obvious need arising from the task force's study is a major staff development effort that will help teachers and administrators implement in the classroom those strategies that do make a difference in writing instruction and growth of student abilities. The basic structures exist to support a statewide staff development effort. State colleges in Nebraska and elsewhere are located to serve many teachers, as are regional service agencies.

Supporting and providing for a statewide staff development effort in writing is among the recommendations the task force made to the state board of education. The state, it said, should involve universities and colleges, local districts, educational service units, the Nebraska Writing Project and the Nebraska Department of Education.

Other recommendations to the board to improve writing instruction and learning in Nebraska include:

- Make facility in the uses of English a priority in state schools.
- Require all teacher candidates to complete a three-credit-hour course or its equivalent on the teaching of writing as described in current research.
- Require all teachers seeking recertification to complete a similar course.
- Support pilot projects that develop and demonstrate effective and useful means of writing assessment and programs of writing across the curriculum.
- Request local boards of education to explore changes in staffing patterns that will provide students frequent opportunities to write and teachers the time to devote careful attention to each student's writing.

The structure of most writing courses we examined contradicts much of what research shows to be effective. For example, schools often fail to recognize the primary purpose of writing—to communicate.

The task force recommended that boards of education and school administrators should:

- Declare that all teachers must be competent in the uses of English and provide effective inservice programming to assist them.
- Develop staffing patterns that will provide students with frequent opportunities to write and teachers with the time to give careful attention to each student's writing.
- Support the professional development of elementary and secondary teachers of writing through provision of inservice programming, at least partial financial support for teachers to attend state and national professional meetings and subscriptions to professional journals.
- Recognize the achievements of students and teachers through such means as honors assemblies, student publications, school and/or departmental newsletters and contacts with the news media.

English/language arts teachers should:

- Seek out and take advantage of opportunities to learn about current theory and practice in the teaching of writing.
- Empower student writers by teaching the strategies of the writing process; encouraging them to select topics and to write frequently of their experiences and interests; encouraging the sharing of writing and the talking about writing in the classroom; helping them find a variety of audiences; publishing student writing; and incorporating word processing into the writing program.
- Recognize the limitations of textbooks; reject those that fragment the writing process and/or emphasize grammar and drill over composing.
- Provide opportunities for students to write rather than study grammar or drill on mechanics.
- Address problems in mechanics and usage in the proofreading stage of student writing during individual conferences or in meetings of small groups of writers experiencing the same or similar problems.
- Make writing classes places where writing is performed, discussed, revised and published rather than where it is only assigned and deposited for grading.
- Assist teachers in other subject areas to incorporate writing in their classes.
- Communicate frequently with the administration, board of education and parents to establish the goals, methods, rationale and accomplishments of the writing program.
- Provide rich and continuous reading experience, including both published literature of acknowledged merit and the work of peers and instructors.

The adoption of these recommendations will raise considerably the level of learning in Nebraska and ensure that students are receiving the best possible instruction and the widest opportunities to improve their writing skills in a manner far more meaningful and critical than current study of grammar and mechanics allows.

Sources

1. Arthur N. Applebee et al., "The Writing Report Card," (Princeton, N.J.: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1986).

2. Ernest L. Boyer, High School and Beyond: A Report on Secondary Education in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).

3. James N. Britton et al., "The Development of Writing Abilities" (London: Macmillan, 1975).

4. Paul B. Dierderich, "Measuring Growth in English" (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974).

5. Marcia Farr and Harvey Daniels, "Language Diversity and Writing Instruction" (Urbana, Ill.: ERIC, 1986).

6. A. R. Gere, ed., "Roots in the Sawdust: Writing to Learn Across the Disciplines" (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1985).

7. Allan A. Glatthorn, "Writing in the Schools: Improvement Through Effective Leadership" (Reston, Va.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981).

8. Donald H. Graves, "Writing: Teachers and Children at Work" (Exeter, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983).

9. Donald H. Graves, "A Researcher Learns to Write" (Exeter, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1985).

10. Shirley M. Haley-James, ed., "Perspectives on Writing in Grades 1-8" (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE/ERIC, 1986).

11. George Hillocks, Jr., "Research on Written Composition" (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE/ERIC, 1986).

12. "Qualities of Good Writing Programs" (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1984).

The Art of Questioning

by Dennis Palmer Wolf

How do teachers question students? Good questioning, the lowest cost of all higher-literacy teaching strategies, appears to be a rarely employed skill.

Ask a teacher how he or she teaches and chances are the answer is, "By asking questions." However, if you go on to ask just how questions are used, or what sets apart keen, invigorating questioning from perfunctory versions, that same teacher might have a hard time replying.

Consider several observations that have emerged from recent educational research:

1. There are classrooms where teachers rarely pose questions above the read-it-and-repeat-it level.[1]
2. What questions and answers do occur tend to take place in a bland, if not boring or bleak, intellectual landscape, where students learn to expect little more than "uh-huh" for a reply.[2]
3. Classroom questions are often disingenuous. Some are "rhetorical," never mind, sarcastic: "Are we ready to begin now?"[3]
4. Teacher questions can destroy, rather than build, a shared spirit of investigation. First, teachers tend to monopolize the right to question. As a result, rarely do more than procedural questions come from students. Second, the question-driven exchanges that occur in classrooms take place almost uniformly between teachers and students, hardly ever shifting to occur *between* students.[4]
5. Questions can embarrass, rather than inquire. They can leave a student feeling exposed and stupid, more willing to skip class than to risk being humiliated.[5]

From my point of view, it is not accidental that observations in arts and humanities classrooms have provided an exceptionally rich context in which to examine questioning. In those classes, students can become deeply involved in creating or actively reinterpreting, rather than repeating knowledge. As a result, there occurs a level of investment that provides a foundation for productive questioning. In addition, if the arts and humanities are taught seriously and well, students confront information that has many layers of meaning and multiple interpretations. Those encounters provide an ideal—though certainly not the only—situation in which to look at the ways in which questions, along with other modes of inquiry, can be turned loose on materials that amply repay exploration.

However, before turning to these classroom observations, I want to suggest that the issue of what questions are asked and how they are posed is, or ought to be, part of a much larger inquiry. Currently, there is a deep concern about how—or even if—we teach higher-level thinking skills. There is startling evidence that many high-school students cannot draw inferences from texts, distinguish the relevant information in mathematics problems, or provide and defend a thesis in an essay. We have apparently developed a system of education where rote learning occurs early and inquiry late. We teach the skills to scribes and clerks, rather than authors and mathematicians.[6] We have come to accept a view of education that sees the experience of schooling largely in terms of its power to produce employable, rather than intelligent, students and that suffers from basic confusions over the conflicts between pluralism and excellence.[7]

However, embedded in this broad concern there is—or ought to be—a second critique, one that points out that the situation of disadvantaged,

Dr. Wolf is a Research Project Associate in Education for the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

minority, female and handicapped students is still more dire.[8] For many of them, skills such as analysis, hypothesis testing, discussion and essay writing may not just be taught late and meagerly—they may be virtually unavailable. These students live in an educational world where there is great confusion about different versus delayed paths of development and far too little skill or support available for those whose growth is genuinely handicapped.

Hence, when we examine skilled questioning (or instruction of any kind), it is essential to learn from those teachers who understand how to engage a wide community of learners. As one college teacher put it, "It's not hard to teach philosophy to students who learned the rules of argument and evidence at the dinner table. That's a matter of dotting the i's and crossing the t's. The real issue is whether I can teach students who don't already come knowing."

Students need the face-to-face skill of raising questions with other people: clarity about what they don't understand and want to know; the willingness to ask; the bravery to ask again.

The Art of Questioning

Independent of whom they teach, skilled teachers question in distinctive ways: They raise a range of questions, they sustain and build arcs of questions, their inquiries are authentic, they inquire with a sense of respect and decency.

A Range of Questioning

Thirty years ago, Benjamin Bloom[9] suggested that the same information can be handled in more and less demanding ways—students can be asked to recall fact, to analyze those facts, to synthesize or create new information based on the facts, or to evaluate knowledge. Sitting in the back of arts and humanities classes reinforces, and perhaps expands, the sense that as a tool, the questions take many forms.

An Arc of Questions

But a variety of questions hardly creates a climate for inquiry. At least as important is the way in which teachers respond to the answers their questions provoke. Thus, recent research[10] suggests that too often students' replies meet with little more than a passing acknowledgment ("Mmmm-mmmm" or "uh-huh"). Such responses stop inquiry in its tracks. In place of such dead-end situations, skilled teachers give an exchange of questions a life-course. Across a long arc of questions and answers, they produce a kind of microgenesis in which simple factual inquiries give way to increasingly interpretive questions until novel insights emerge. An observer has the impression of a kind of mutually constructed improvisation unfolding.[11] It can be an improvisation that stays alive for days, even weeks.

The Authenticity of Questions

Many of the questions that occur in classrooms are simply not genuine. Some—such as "Will you please put away your brushes and paints?"—are aimed at little more than conduct. Others—in fact, the majority—are insincere in another way. They are not requests for information the speaker genuinely needs—rather, they are checks to see if a student has the information a teacher already knows.[12] These covert commands and information checks are not evil—unless, of course, they are the only questions students hear. In that case, students lose the opportunity to see their teachers engaged in serious inquiry, where questions function as bona fide tools for thinking and understanding.

The way in which teachers question provides a kind of barometer for the social values of classrooms—particularly questions of who can learn and who can teach. To begin, the way in which teachers question reveal whether they suspect learning flows only from a teacher or whether it can come from other students.

Through their questions, teachers have the power to offer opportunities for dialogue to particular groups of students or to withhold such opportunities from them. A 1982 study, for example, found that, when compared to their female peers, young males are much more likely to ask questions and to have them answered in a serious way.[13] Minority students' participation in classroom discussion is similarly endangered. We know that there are culturally organized differences between classroom and home regarding the appropriateness of asking questions, the rules about who can be questioned or what forms inquiries should take.[14] Yet, when minority students fail to join in classroom inquiry, teachers may interpret their hesitation, not as uncertainly about the rules of communication, but as lack of ability, ceasing to consider them valuable, contributing members of a class.[15]

Clearly, teachers can use questions to embarrass or empower. For instance, questions can be designed to smoke out guilty parties—students

who didn't do their homework, who fail to answer quickly enough, or who can't think on their feet. But it is equally possible to use questions to promote students' sense of themselves as knowledgable and skilled.

Then Why So Few Questions?

Teachers know questions to be one of their most familiar—maybe even one of their most powerful—tools. But if observations are accurate, much of classroom inquiry is low-level, short, even exclusive or harsh. Moreover, these qualities turn out to be remarkably resistant to change. Thus, the original study of questioning done in 1912[16] found that two-thirds of classroom questions required nothing more than direct recitation of textbook information. Now, more than 70 years after the original study, 60 percent of the questions student hear require factual answers, 20 percent concern procedures and only 20 percent require inference, transfer or reflection.[17]

Here, ironically, where the vital issue of what fuels or explains these persistent patterns of questioning emerges, there is little or no research. But pieces of explanation exist both in the phenomenology of what teachers experience and in a wider analysis of classrooms as educational and social systems.

When teachers hear the dreary statistics about classroom inquiry, they are quick to reply. They freely admit that they have colleagues who are simply not interested in the work of questioning, but they also point out that establishing a classroom where inquiry flourishes is not simple:

There are 34 students in the room, some have read the story, others haven't; some understand, others are lost. It takes skill—lots of skill—to put together a discussion for those 34 people. Frankly, it is often easier for me to take charge.

Questions work fine when you have students who have a set of prior skills—I mean who know about listening to what someone else says, who can follow up with a question of their own, who are used to digging for information. But what do you do when you don't find that? Do you stop to teach it? And how do you teach it, anyway?

But teachers are adamant about not stopping the analysis at the level of individuals' skills or level of commitment: "Don't forget that teachers live day in and day out in a school culture. That culture teaches. In most places it teaches you to suspect that there is nothing to learn from students." In particular, teachers argue that schooling takes place in the midst of a network of educational and social assumptions that have profound effects on learning and teaching.

To begin, teachers argue that learning in schools is shaped by a particular definition of learning, one that can be summed up in terms of subject-matter mastery, rather than the application or extension of knowledge or the invention of new knowledge:

It is a culture that puts coverage above all. You have to cover all of "Macbeth" in 12th-grade English, never mind how your students read. You have to get through World War II. What is begun by textbooks, tests enforce. In that world, questions, especially big messy ones, are dangerous. You have to keep too many of them from happening.

There is startling evidence that many high-school students cannot draw inferences from texts, distinguish the relevant information in mathematics problems, or provide and defend a thesis in an essay. We have apparently developed a system of education where rote learning occurs early and inquiry late.

What is to be learned is defined largely by what can be efficiently measured. Thus, whether they are weekly quizzes or examinations at major educational transitions, identification and multiple-choice items appear early, and essays come late—if at all. Assessments based on whole or novel works are typically reserved for marginal populations—students who reach the extra-credit section, advanced-placement students, art or music students. In such a climate, it is only adaptive to ask and answer a preponderance of factual or procedural questions—they are the curriculum.

Teachers also sense a second, more elusive, educational assumption that affects how they teach. This is the assumption of a fixed scope and sequence—a ladder in which basic skills are seen as necessarily preceding "higher-level" inquiry skills. Typically, basic-level skills function as gatekeepers. A student who has difficulty spelling or writing whole sentences is not asked or allowed to write stories and essays or asked to interpret texts. In this way, inquiry skills are hoarded into the upper tracks or higher grades.

Consequently, sophisticated questioning or investigative strategies become the private preserve of the relatively few teachers and students in senior high school, advanced-placement classes or programs for the gifted and talented. So accepted is the definition of basic and higher-order skills that we have lost sight of what may be a much more viable alternative—teaching inquiry to all students, in ways that are tuned to their particular abilities.

educational HORIZONS

Social Aspect of Schooling

If subject-matter mastery and intellectual gatekeeping characterize the educational life in many schools, the social aspect of schooling has equally pronounced features. First, much of education takes the form of "batch-processing." In high schools, through scheduling and tracking, much has been done to diminish the diversity of the 30 individuals who fill the room.

In addition, the very way in which we present information tends to homogenize learning and points of view. For example, the majority of students learn their American literature by reading the same text at the same pace, guided by identical questions. But if the point is to provide them with a deep sense of texture of American romantic writing, why not ask some to read Poe, some Longfellow, some Stephen Foster song lyrics, some contemporary British writers? That kind of dispersal and diversification of knowledge would make discussion essential. The cost of everyone reading the same works all the time is that we radically reduce students' (and teachers') reasons to inquire of one another.

Finally, despite the group nature of virtually all public instruction, what goes on in classrooms is strangely asocial, constrained by a belief in individual achievement, rather than joint social construction of insight. If the prevalence of seatwork, individual homework assignments and strictures about discussing answers is any sign, there is a deeply held belief that turning over the process of instruction to group work is either abdication or cheating. Discussions, collaborative science projects, peer critiques are rare despite the fact that school hallways are full of adolescents whose major mode of learning is to copy, examine or argue with the knowledge of their peers.

Not only does this asocial climate seem a waste of what adolescents do best (contend, doubt, tease), it also bottles up the natural cognitive energies of a situation in which differences of abilities, outlooks and points of view might motivate and inform inquiry. We have the wrong metaphor for learning. We need to replace the notion of the scholar isolated in a cave of books with a different picture — something more like the necessarily collaborative atmosphere of a science laboratory or a theatre production. At a deeper level, we need to confront the mythology that joint work inevitably leads to homogenization, indifference or lack of achievement.

So what do teachers see as answers? Concretely, teachers want time to think about their classes as moments of joint inquiry—time to observe skilled colleagues in action, time to see themselves on videotape, time to think through not just lesson plans but process plans: when to ask, who to ask and above all, how to respond.[18] Teachers want not just to hear about how "prejudicial teacher questioning patterns are," they want time to grapple with equity and excellence issues head-on, at the level of values and ethics.

And most profoundly, teachers want to be engaged in inquiry themselves. Teachers want to join with scholars to think about curriculum as occurs in the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute or the university-school collaborations of the Los Angeles-based Humanitas Academy. They want to have their own skills probed and honed in the way that the Bay Area Writing Program or the Dialogue Program in St. Paul does by offering them (not just their students) time to write. Simply put, many teachers want to learn about the skills demanded in questioning and other forms of inquiry—but they want to learn in ways that will sustain their own abilities to inquire and reflect.

Why Question?

If the challenges are this great, it is well to ask exactly what comes of being questioned? Some research concludes that students exposed to higher-order questions attain more than students without similar experiences,[19] but there is also evidence to the contrary.[20] If classroom inquiry is incidental—if lecture and recitation lead to the same levels of achievement—why bother?

Possibly the reason to bother is that there is a competing view which suggests that student achievement—as it is traditionally measured—is not the only, or best, yardstick for measuring the effects of asking and answering good questions. Possibly we should be tracking two other, more difficult to measure, outcomes.

First, there is a social outcome—students need the face-to-face skill of raising questions with other people: clarity about what they don't understand and want to know; the willingness to ask; the bravery to ask again. It is as central in chasing down the meaning of a dance, the lessons of the Korean War, or the uses and abuses of nuclear reactors. One could rephrase the Chinese proverb: Give a man a question and he inquires for a day, teach a man to question and he inquires for life.

And there is a creative or inventive outcome. Being asked and learning to pose strong questions might offer students a deeply held, internal blueprint for inquiry—apart from the prods and supports of questions from without. That blueprint would have many of the qualities that teachers' best questions do: range, arc, authenticity. But if the sum is greater than the parts,

there might be an additional quality—call it a capacity for question-finding.[21] Question-finding is the ability to go to a poem, a painting, a piece of music—a document, a mathematical description, a science experiment—and locate a novel direction for investigation. How, for instance, does a young musician go back to a Dvorak piece practiced and heard hundreds of times, and find a way of rehearing it, reinterpreting it, so that something novel is exposed?

Here Gertrude Stein comes to mind. While she lay dying someone leaned over to ask her, "What is the answer?" and she, so long a practiced question-asker, still had to energy to quip, "What is the question?"

This article originally appeared in its complete version in *Academic Connections*, Winter 1987, Copyright 1987 by the College Entrance Board. All rights reserved.

Notes

1. M. Gall, "The Use of Questions in Teaching," *Review of Educational Research*, 40 (1970), pp. 707-720; and S.R. Mills, C.T. Rice, D.C. Berliner and E.W. Rousseau, "The Correspondence Between Teacher Questions and Student Answers in Classroom Discourse," *Journal of Experimental Education*, 48 (1980), pp. 194-204.
2. J. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); and D. Sadker and M. Sadker, "Is the O.K. Classroom O.K.?" *Phi Delta Kappan* (January 1985).
3. C. Bly, "Using Social Work Techniques in Classroom Discussions," a talk given at the Second Annual Teachers and Writers Institute, sponsored by Dialogue Program of COMPAS, St. Paul, Minn. (October 10-11, 1986); and J. Cook-Gumperz, "Communicative Competence in Educational Perspective," in L. Cherry-Wilkinson, ed., *Communicating in the Classroom* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).
4. F. Erickson, "Gatekeeping and the Melting Pot," *Harvard Educational Review*, 45:1 (1975), pp. 40-77; F. Erickson and J. Schultz, "When Is a Context? Some Issues and Methods in the Analysis of Social Competence," in J. Green and C. Wallat (eds.), *Ethnology and Language in Educational Settings* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981); and R. Hall and B. Sandler, "The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?" (Association of American Colleges, 1982).
5. See Bly, 1986.
6. L. Resnick, "Education and Learning to Think," a report to the National Research Council, 1985 (in press, National Academy of Sciences); and Dennis Wolf et al., "Beyond A, B, C: Deeper and Broader Conceptions of Literacy," in A. Pellegini, ed., *The Psychological Bases of Early Education* (London: John Wiley Sons, in press).
7. Lazerson, Marvin. "A Review of A Study of High Schools," *Harvard Educational Review*, 56:1 (1986), pp. 37-48.
8. National Coalition of Advocates for Students, *Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk* (Boston: NCAS, 1985).
9. B. Bloom, ed., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain* (New York: David McKay, 1956).
10. See D. Sadker and M. Sadker, 1985.
11. H. Mehan, "Structuring School Structure," *Harvard Educational Review*, 48:1 (1978), pp. 32-64; and *Learning Lessons: Social Organization in the Classroom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979).
12. See Cook-Gumperz, 1982.
13. See R. Hall and B. Sandler, 1982.
14. S. Boggs, "The Meaning of Questions and Narratives to Hawaiian Children," in C. Cazden, V. Johns and D. Hymes, eds., *Functions of Language in the Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972); S.B. Heath, *Ways With Words* (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
15. D.W. Bremme and F. Erickson, "Relationships Among Verbal and Nonverbal Classroom Behaviors," *Theory Into Practice*, 16:3 (1977), pp. 153-61.
16. R. Stevens, "The Question as a Measure of Efficiency in Instruction: A Critical Study of Classroom Practice," *Teachers College Contributions to Education*, 48 (1912).
17. M. Gall, "The Use of Questions in Teaching," *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 40 (1970), pp. 707-720.
18. T. Kasulis, "Questioning," in M.M. Gullete, ed., *The Art and Craft of Teaching* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986).
19. F.P. Hunkins, "The Effects and Analysis and Evaluation Questions on Various Levels of Achievement," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois (1968); and I.A. Wilson, "Changes in Mean Levels of Thinking in Grades 1-8 Through Use of an Interaction Analysis System Based on Bloom's Taxonomy," *Journal of Educational Research*, 66:9 (1973), pp. 423-429.
20. M. Gall, B. Ward. D. Berliner, L. Cahen, P. Winne, J. Elashoff and G. Stanton, "Effects of Questioning Techniques and Recitation on Student Learning," *American Educational Research Journal*, 15:2 (1978), pp. 175-199.
21. J. Getzels and M. Csikszentmihalyi, *The Creative Vision: A Longitudinal Study of Problem Finding in Art* (New York: Wiley, 1976).

Additional References

1. J. Bruner, "Going Beyond the Information Given," in J. Bruner et al., eds., *Contemporary Approaches to Cognition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957).
2. D. Campbell, "Developing Mathematical Literacy in a Bilingual Classroom," in J. Gumperz, ed., *The Social Construction of Literacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
3. The College Board (Dennis and Thomas Wolf, principal consultants, 1985).
4. V. John Steiner, *Notebooks of the Mind* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985).
5. A.V. Luria, *Cognitive Development: Its Social and Cultural Foundations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).
6. K. Tobin, "Effects of Teacher Wait Time," *American Educational Research Journal*, 1986.
7. J. Wertsch, "Adult-child Interaction and the Roots of Metacognition, *The Quarterly Newsletter of the Institute for Comparative Human Cognition*, 1, pp. 15-18 (1978).
8. L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychosocial Processes*, trans. by Michael Cole et al. (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

Textbook Selection and Curriculum Change

by Roger Farr

Textbooks are an integral part of the education process. The selection of textbooks can help or hinder efforts to broaden teaching or learning. How can textbook selection and usage be changed to help improve the education of students?

Those who want to modify curriculum often look to textbooks as the means to bring about that change. However, changing textbooks is not an easy task. Everyone knows that textbook committees select textbooks, but how do they go about the task, and will textbook publishers produce texts to meet the differing criteria of each committee?

What are the facts about textbook selection and adoption: Do textbooks dominate classroom instruction? Will improved textbooks lead to better instruction? Can improved textbook selection procedures foster the development of better textbooks? How effective are present textbook selection procedures? How can textbook selection be improved?

Textbook Selection and the Improvement of Education

The selection of textbooks has become a matter of serious attention for most education policymakers interested in curriculum improvement. Foremost among the reasons for this attention have been the claims of education critics who have argued that poor textbooks are one of the primary culprits in the decline of the quality of education. In a speech before the American Association of School Administrators in February, 1984, former Secretary of Education Terrel Bell criticized the content of textbooks used in schools, the textbook publishing industry and the policies and procedures of textbook adoption committees. Using the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, *A Nation at Risk*,[1] as the basis for his attacks, Bell said that schools are not spending enough for textbooks, that there has been a "dumbing down" of textbooks due to a disproportionate concern with readability levels, and that present ineffective methods of textbook selection should be replaced with coordinated and cooperative efforts which provide educators with greater leverage for influencing and shaping textbook content.[2]

Other critics have asserted that textbooks are incoherent, poorly organized, contain factual errors and are written to satisfy the requirements of a readability formula rather than being concerned with clear communication.

In addition to the concern with the negative influence of poor textbooks on learning, policymakers have read the research literature that suggests that most classrooms are textbook-dominated. These studies have shown that regardless of the state- or school district-adopted curriculum, it is the textbook that determines what is taught in the classroom. Thus, they have de-

Dr. Farr is a Professor of Education and Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Development, Indiana University.

cided that if the curriculum is to improve, they must have more control over the textbooks that are used.

Other critics of textbooks are disturbed that the content of certain textbooks refutes or contradicts their religious beliefs. The recent court cases in Hawkins County, Tennessee, and in Alabama emphasize the nature of these cases. While claims of this sort are not new, their continuation and their success in getting some textbooks removed from classrooms emphasizes their importance.

Thus, textbooks are looked to as the culprit behind many of the ills of education, and the textbook adoption process is seen as a means to bring about change. The solution rests on the assumption that textbooks are selected by a logical/thoughtful process that can be understood and modified—and therefore influenced. The kind of influences that seem to be suggested are to get committees to choose books that are more comprehensive and difficult, that match local curriculum, and that are devoid of religious, ethnic, sexual (and all other) bias. By getting committees to focus on these "important" factors in their selection process, the argument is made that better textbooks will be selected for use in classrooms.

Furthermore, this focus is seen as the means to get publishers to produce better textbooks. The argument is made that if committees focus on these "important criteria," then publishers will produce the kinds of textbooks desired.

There are, however, problems with this seemingly simple solution to improvement. In order to understand these problems, it is necessary to understand how the present textbook selection system functions.

Do Textbooks Dominate Classroom Instruction?

In most classrooms at both the elementary and high school levels in the United States, a textbook is the primary focus of instruction. Single textbooks, with accompanying workbooks and other supplemental materials, are used in 96 percent of elementary reading classes. Paul Goldstein concluded that textbooks are the focus of more than 75 percent of a pupil's classroom time.[3]

School district and state curriculum guides gather dust on teachers' shelves while textbook manuals determine courses of study. Teachers strive to "cover the text", and to complete all of the prescribed activities in the accompanying workbooks. As a result, they give little thought to the district's curriculum goals. If a textbook includes tests to accompany a unit or chapter, worksheets for practice activities, homework assignment sheets and study guide suggestions for reading each chapter, the chances of successful sales increase significantly. It seems some teachers want all of these things so their work is easier.

However, it is not just the teachers who are to blame for this sorry state of affairs. The textbook adoption committees push publishers to match their texts to the district curriculum and publishers try to include everything listed in school curriculum guides. They strain to give schools a total curriculum wrapped up in a hardbound cover—and it cannot be done. Attempts to do so lead to merely mentioning important topics, surface treatment of many subjects, inappropriate labeling, and the inclusion of every teaching aid possible.

The organization and coherence of textbooks should be a primary concern of textbook adoption committees. Studies have shown that better-written textbooks are easier to comprehend. Textbooks should pay attention to connections between ideas, overall structure of content, and introduction of new ideas and vocabulary so students can learn independently.

More importantly, the problem is not just including all these extras and skimming the surface; the problem is that the major focus of a textbook as a tool of instruction gets lost when a textbook is developed to be a "do-it-all" curriculum. A textbook cannot be the total curriculum. However, as long as schools use them that way and textbook committees review them from that perspective, publishers will produce textbooks that try to do everything and end up doing few things well.

The organization and coherence of textbooks should be a primary concern of textbook adoption committees. Studies have shown that better-written textbooks are easier to comprehend. Textbooks should pay attention to connections between ideas, overall structure of content, and introduction of new ideas and vocabulary so students can learn independently.

Will Improved Textbooks Lead to Better Instruction?

There is, of course, no easy answer to this question. A number of studies have shown that different textbook approaches have produced dif-

ferent learning. For example, studies in reading have demonstrated that children who use a textbook with a strong emphasis on phonics in first grade perform better on phonics tests than do those children whose textbooks emphasize a meaning approach. However, even with a topic such as phonics, which seems to be so clearly delineated in the textbooks, there is much disagreement about the influence of the approach used.

Additionally, based on the evidence that textbooks are a very important factor in determining the content and procedures used for teaching each subject, perhaps we should be concerned about decreasing the use of textbooks in classrooms. As long as we continue to look for textbooks as the salvation of education, it is unlikely that education will improve. As important as textbooks are, they pale in comparison to the influence of a knowledgeable, motivated, interesting teacher. A good teacher uses a textbook to get where he or she wants to lead the children, not vice versa. We need to spend time teaching teachers how to teach so they don't slavishly follow a textbook.

Publishers produce what they believe most schools will purchase, and they pay far greater attention to the large adoption states such as California and Texas (which purchase the same texts for all their school districts) than they do to the nonadoption states. Textbook publishers carefully review these states' curriculum guidelines as they plan the development of new textbooks, which are written to coincide with major states' adoption cycles.

It must be the teacher who plans the instruction, selects the teaching materials, and paces and assesses each pupil's success. These crucial activities cannot be abandoned to the structure of a textbook. Every child and classroom is different. "One size fits all" does not work with textbooks. Improving textbooks will not lead to significantly better instruction; only improving teachers will do that. John Maxwell, executive director of the National Council of Teachers of English, emphasized that point when he wrote that educators should stop hoping that textbooks can cover everything about a subject. Instead, educators must determine what is most important.[4]

Can Improved Textbook Adoption Procedures Foster the Development of Better Textbooks?

The evidence that textbook publishers will produce what sells is overwhelming. However, it is not certain whether this fact can be used to influence the development of better books.

The publishers agree that they produce "the very best textbooks that educators will purchase." Robert Follett wrote:

> From the publisher's standpoint, the textbook adoption process is the system that produces sales. . . .
>
> Successful publishers produce textbooks that appeal to adoption committees. These committees, composed primarily of professional educators, make the selections that result in sales. A textbook is likely to appeal to a selection committee if it promises to make the job of the professional educator easier by facilitating classroom management according to established practices and procedures, and if it helps students to acquire necessary skills, knowledge or attitudes. A book should also avoid controversy and not draw protests from the press or public.[5]

The influence of the large adoption states is a generally accepted fact.[6,7] There is little question that a few major states and their adoption committees presently determine the content of textbooks. Because of the influence of these large states, textbooks tend to become more alike than different. What is not so clear is whether the state adoption process will produce the best books, or whether we should be encouraging publishers to produce textbooks with different approaches. If it is diversity we want, then the large state adoption process is probably inappropriate.

Publishers produce what they believe most schools will purchase, and they pay far greater attention to the large adoption states such as California and Texas (which purchase the same texts for all their school districts) than they do to the nonadoption states. Textbook publishers carefully review these states' curriculum guidelines as they plan the development of new textbooks, which are written to coincide with major states' adoption cycles.

Several of the large adoption states have acted to improve textbook adoption processes and to use the process as a lever to improve textbooks as well as to gain greater control over the curriculum. Because of the large amount of money provided directly by the Texas legislature each time new books are adopted, Texas has always

exerted a strong influence on textbook content. In the past several years, California and Florida have attempted to improve textbooks through the adoption process. There is evidence that their influence is being felt by publishers, but it is not yet known whether better textbooks or improved learning will result.

For example, in the recent California elementary mathematics textbooks selection, the state selection committee rejected all of the submitted textbooks because they did not meet its curriculum guidelines. That single act will cause a serious reexamination of the mathematics textbooks. California also has adopted a new framework for language arts instruction which will be used to select reading and language arts textbooks next year.

Florida has taken a somewhat different approach. It has developed a fairly extensive training program for all who take part in the review and selection of textbooks. In other states and local school districts increasing attention is being paid to the text selection process.

How Effective are Present Textbook Selection Procedures?

Textbook adoption is a varied and complex process often discussed as if there were just two types—state adoption and local district adoption. Such discussions seriously over-simplify the situation. Even cursory study reveals there is no monolithic textbook adoption process. Although 22 states have some form of statewide adoption, their textbook adoption and purchase procedures and policies differ considerably.

Some states adopt a list of not more than five texts, while others include "all those books which match the adoption criteria." Several states adopt texts only at the elementary school level. In a few states, money is provided to purchase new texts; in other states, the money to purchase texts must come from each school district's general fund.

The practices in the open-territory states (where school districts can select any textbooks rather than just those approved by the state) differ even more widely. In a few small districts, the superintendent discusses textbook selection with a few hand-picked teachers before making a purchase recommendation to the board of education.

In most large school districts, an elaborate set of review and advisory committees and procedures are established. Committees make textbook recommendations which are usually adopted by a board. Selection procedures may be formal or informal, and may have minimal or stringent criteria for textbook evaluation.

A significant variation in the review and adoption process incorporates pilot studies subjecting textbooks to classroom use prior to their purchase. Sometimes the pilot studies are quite informal and take place over a couple of weeks. In other cases, the pilot studies last for an entire year and are accompanied by a variety of evaluation procedures.

As long as we continue to look for textbooks as the salvation of education, it is unlikely that education will improve. As important as textbooks are, they pale in comparison to the influence of a knowledgeable, motivated, interesting teacher.

Another major difference in textbook adoption procedures is the amount of contact committee members have with the representatives of textbook publishing companies. In some adoptions, contact between publishers and committee members is strictly forbidden. In others, textbook publishers present and describe their texts to the panel. Some committees allow the publishers' representatives to visit members as often as they like, and to use common sales promotion techniques to obtain sales. Committee members are taken to dinners, special textbook presentation sessions are held at vacation resorts, and special favors such as trips to professional conventions are provided.

Criteria sheets listing factors that the committee believes important in selecting textbooks provide further insight into the process and practices of textbook adoption committees. A review of 70 sheets secured from school districts in both adoption and nonadoption states suggests some of the strongest influences on committee decisions.

The only criterion listed on all 70 sheets was the copyright date, which apparently is used to determine how current the textbook's content is.

Surprisingly, in light of criticism of the supposedly strong influence of readability formulas on textbook selection, only 73 percent of the sheets included readability as a selection criteria.

Most forms emphasize the presence of a particular factor rather than its quality. That is, there often are descriptions of what the criterion refers to, but there is no discussion of what differentiates quality in the way that factor is presented.

Committees seem to give equal emphasis to all the factors included on the criteria sheet. Raters are sometimes directed to evaluate texts by assigning a number for each of the factors on the

list. These numbers are then added together to give a total evaluation for the text.

The number of criteria on any one sheet is overwhelming. The longest criteria sheet included 180 items and the shortest included 42, for an average of 73 factors.

A doctoral study at Indiana University[8] provides additional insight into the decision-making processes of local adoption committees. Although it is not clear which factors had the most influence on decision-making, the study found five general factors that influenced committee members' decisions:

- *Publishers*— the quality of publishers' presentations; the personalities of the representatives; the order in which publishers make their presentations to the committee; and, the reputation of each publishing company.
- *Pilot try-outs*— the reputations of the teachers who piloted the programs; the length and extent of the pilot study; and the publishers' services to the pilot teachers.

Perhaps the most important factor for policymakers to consider is the state adoption versus nonadoption issue. Large adoption states exert a strong influence on textbooks. Whether it is accepted or not, the books that these states demand are the books that the smaller and nonadoption states get.

- *Politics*— the personalities of the people on the adoption committee; the books that were selected in nearby schools; attempts at compromise to get one book acceptable to everyone; and the interrelationships of the people on the committee.
- *Processes*— the amount of time committee members were able to devote to the process; other obligations of committee members; the particular organization of the committee; the organization of criteria sheets used; and the procedures developed to allow textbook publishers to make presentations.
- *Pedagogy*— educational trends and local issues; the strength of the program as viewed by primary-grade teachers; the committee members' experiences and attitudes with previous reading textbooks; and each committee members' beliefs about teaching reading.

This study reveals that the textbook process is complicated, and solutions aimed at improving the process must recognize that complexity.

How Can Textbook Selection Be Improved?

Perhaps the most important factor for policymakers to consider is the state adoption versus nonadoption issue. Large adoption states exert a strong influence on textbooks. Whether it is accepted or not, the books that these states demand are the books that the smaller and nonadoption states get. The influence of the adoption states does provide a lever for changing textbooks, but that influence probably results in greater textbook homogeneity.

Consequently, it is easy to discover what the key issues in any state are by examining the advertising campaigns of publishers. For example, California, in its new language arts framework, has emphasized that basal reading programs must include quality literature. When the new (or at least revised) basal reading programs are presented to the California adoption committee, each publisher will emphasize the quality of its literature; each will claim to have more award-winning stories than the other; each will argue that it has the best-known and favorite children's stories and authors; and each will look alike!

About half the states are adoption states and half are nonadoption states. Policymakers in most adoption states are convinced their policy is best and fear they cannot control the curriculum if they do not control the textbooks. Most policymakers in nonadoption states believe the selection of textbooks is best made at the local school district level. Because of these fundamental differences, it is unlikely that we will ever see a uniform policy across states.

However, it seems if a uniform policy were adopted, the policy should recommend that selection be left to the individual school districts for the following reasons:

- Elevating textbook selection to the state level makes it tantamount to curriculum selection.
- Textbook selection at the state level increases the likelihood that national political forces will use the process to draw attention to their issues—often with little regard for improving education.
- The backgrounds and experiences of children differ dramatically in different parts of each state. Thus, local educators should be allowed to determine which books best meet the needs of their students.
- Local educators are as well qualified to review and select textbooks as those selected for state committees.

- Publishers will be more apt to produce new books with varying perspectives if they do not have to rely on success in the adoption states.

In addition to the concern with state adoption/nonadoption, a number of issues should be considered when textbook adoption processes are studied:

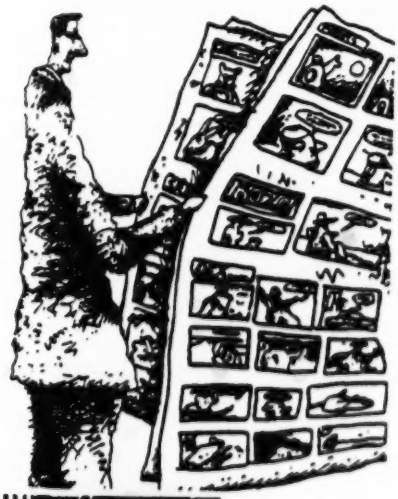
- Specific criteria should be developed before textbooks are examined. These criteria should relate to what a textbook can do—and not what is needed in a total curriculum.
- Textbooks should be tested in short, controlled pilot studies in which a teacher tries out at least two different books.
- Those who review the textbooks should be provided with adequate background in examining books. Furthermore, they should be given enough time to do a thorough review of each textbook.
- Sampling techniques should be developed to give adequate attention to topics. When a reviewer tries to look at everything, there is often only time enough to "flip through" the materials.
- Specific evidence to support the reasons for selecting a particular textbook must be provided by each reviewer.

Notes

1. National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).
2. Terrel H. Bell, "Textbooks and Achievement Tests: Who Determines Their Content and Use in America's Schools?" speech delivered at the annual winter convention of the American Association of School Administrators, Las Vegas, Nev. (February 1984).
3. Paul Goldstein, *Changing the American Schoolbook* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Company, 1978).
4. John Maxwell, "The Future of Textbooks—Can They Help Individualize Instruction?", *The NASSP Bulletin*, 69:481 (May 1985), pp. 68-74.
5. Robert Follett, "The School Textbook Adoption Process," *Book Research Quarterly*, 1:2 (Summer 1985), pp. 19-23.
6. Mike Bowler, "Textbook Publishers Try to Please All, But First They Woo the Heart of Texas," *The Reading Teacher*, 31 (February 1978), pp. 514-518.
7. Barbara Crane, "The 'California Effect' on Textbook Adoptions," *Educational Leadership* (January 1975), pp. 283-285.
8. Deborah A. Powell, "Retrospective Case Studies of Individual and Group Decision Making in District-Level Elementary Reading Textbook Selection," unpublished, doctoral dissertation (1986), Indiana University.

Phi Delta September 1987 • Volume 69 • Number 1

KAPPAN



Who Is Accountable for 'Thoughtfulness'?

According to one definition, thoughtfulness is "characterized by careful, reasoned thinking." Mr. Brown suggests that many schools provide too few incentives for thoughtfulness and too many incentives for just getting by. By holding schools accountable for minimal levels of achievement, we encourage them to deliver just that.

BY REXFORD BROWN

TWO QUITE different characteristics are suggested by the word *thoughtfulness*: absorbed in thought, meditative, "characterized by careful, reasoned thinking"; or considerate of others, selflessly concerned with the needs of others. Today's students are often criticized for lacking thoughtfulness in both senses of the word. Although proposals abound both to make students better thinkers and to make them more mindful of others, in this article I will focus on ways in which administrative structures and assessment procedures can reward or discourage the development of students' reasoning powers.

Concern about students' thinking is not new, though it has waxed and waned. The current fascination has two distinctive features: it is driven by the anxiety of business and industry to remain competitive in world markets, and it extends to all students, not just the college-bound elite.

REXFORD BROWN is director of Policy and the Higher Literacies, a project of the Education Commission of the States, Denver.

In the past, educators pushed thoughtfulness, while the business community seemed more interested in basic skills. Today we find business leaders deploring the schools' overemphasis on the basics because they see a changing economy that will require more creativity and judgment on the part of workers.[1] Interest in quality circles, in getting extraordinary performance out of ordinary people, and in letting those closest to problems help solve them has focused attention – at least for the moment – on the kind of thinking students learn in general, remedial, and vocational classes. It is assumed (perhaps erroneously) that students in higher tracks are already being challenged to think, to solve problems, and to work collaboratively with others.

Certainly the enthusiasm for carrying education for thoughtfulness to all students is not universal. Some observers foresee a future that will call for even less thinking in the workplace and that will offer even fewer jobs that require the exercise of intelligence. What is important, though, is that the debate over this issue has been joined and is growing more intense. Americans do not like

to be behind in anything, and they do not like to see declines. They are not happy that their students trail those of other countries, and they are particularly distressed that the higher-order thinking skills of U.S. students appear to be declining.[2] The popularity of such books as *Cultural Literacy*, by E. D. Hirsch, and *The Closing of the American Mind*, by Allan Bloom, attests to a widespread concern about educational matters that go far beyond the basics.[3]

The question we must ask is, Can schools as we know them become more thoughtful places and produce students who are themselves more thoughtful? Ignoring the prior questions of whether all parents want their children to be more thoughtful or whether the students themselves want to be more thoughtful, we must ask whether the current structure of schooling and the current web of incentives and disincentives would be likely to encourage thoughtfulness.

Observational studies of schools suggest that in many of them very little reading for comprehension goes on, that very little significant writing is done, that very little discussion occurs, and that very little meaningful questioning or Socratic dialogue takes place.[4] Most people would agree that all these activities could be called thought-inducing.

But in real schools textbooks dominate reading materials, and textbooks are commonly attacked for their impoverished prose, incoherent structure, and one-dimensional view of the world. Teachers tend to talk too much and to control classroom events, relegating students to primarily passive roles. Teacher-made tests tend to concentrate on recall of facts and terms and to require filling in blanks or, at most, writing short answers. Standardized tests are typically made up of multiple-choice items that do not call for much in the way of analysis, synthesis, interpretation, evaluation, or open-ended problem solving. State and district tests tend to focus on basic skills,[5] state and district policies tend to stress minimum competencies, and public debate still tends to revolve around the "basics" that the schools have somehow left behind and to which they must somehow return.

These tendencies do not bode well for proponents of more thoughtfulness. Indeed, some advocates of thoughtfulness have given up on the schools entirely and have suggested that communities foster thoughtfulness through the programs of children's museums and historical societies.[6]

It is especially easy to become discouraged about changing our less-successful schools. Everything that happens in them is "overdetermined." That is, there are simply so many reasons why something is done in a particular way that no single reason to change is sufficient. If teaching grammar as a way to improve writing satisfies a dozen personal and institutional agendas, research evidence that explicit grammar instruction has no effect on students' writing ability will not change the school's practice. If we are going to improve schools, we need to know much more about why they are the way they are.

ONE REASONABLE hypothesis to explain why so many schools are inhospitable to thoughtfulness is that there are too few incentives for thoughtfulness and too many incentives for just getting by. Certainly the observations of Eleanor Farrar, Arthur Powell, and David Cohen about the "shopping mall high school" provide evidence to support this hypothesis.[7] When it comes to schools, we get pretty much what we ask for; by holding schools accountable for minimal levels of achievement, we encourage them to deliver just that. What would happen if we held them strictly accountable for more?

Of course, there are many reasons why we don't hold schools strictly accountable for teaching more than the basics. For one thing, many of us believe that the majority of students do not particularly want to be in school and in any case are not blessed with the talent it takes to excel. It would be silly of us and harmful to such students, we reason, to ask more of them than they can deliver. So we measure their mental capacity, assign them to classes with their intellectual peers, and persuade ourselves that we have done enough.

Then, too, many of us are captivated by theories of teaching and learning that tell us to break knowledge into discrete pieces and to teach and test these pieces one by one, starting with the simplest elements. We then find that knowledge can be broken into so many pieces that we wind up spending all our time covering the simple elements and never get to the more complicated stuff, try though we may. Many of us have also noticed that it is easier to develop tests if we ask questions about these basic elements than if we ask students to write or talk about more complicated matters. Psychometric "science" has been very helpful in this regard by showing that success on very elemental test items correlates with success on more complicated endeavors. Thus we are freed from the burden of designing tests of more complicated tasks.

Everyone is ultimately held accountable for the same thing: student achievement, as measured by tests of basic skills.

Finally, many of us undoubtedly fear thoughtfulness because it cannot be easily controlled. Too much of it, and suddenly we've lost track of time, haven't covered the required material, or face questions that we cannot – or do not wish to – answer.

No doubt another reason we attend so faithfully to minimums and basics is that state and local policy makers hold us strictly accountable for them. It is the policy makers' job to establish minimum standards in housing, health matters, prison conditions, building codes, and so forth. We all benefit from the enforcement of such standards, and it is perfectly reasonable for policy makers to establish and monitor minimum standards for education, as well.

The problem with a policy that is minimum-oriented, however, is that it requires a free market or some other such device to push it toward excellence. Take health codes in the restaurant business, for example. The government sees to it that standards that minimize the number of rats in restaurant kitchens are enforced, and this greatly boosts my confidence in dining out. But

the government need not do very much to promote excellence, because restaurant critics, Michelin guides, culinary awards, and the incentives and disincentives of the marketplace serve to promote excellence and run mediocrity out of business.

Education policy has been strong on enforcing minimums, but it has had no system of comparable strength to push for maximums. We have relied on rhetoric, pride, subsidies, and the pressure of test scores as the primary tools for promoting excellence. Rhetoric is very important for establishing a climate that is conducive to excellence, but it can only go so far. Pride is a wonderful thing to count on, but it weakens quickly in bureaucratic settings and sooner or later needs tangible support. Subsidies have certainly brought a number of innovations into the schools and remain a formidable means of making things happen, but subsidies are subject to the whims of politics and are not dependable. The pressure exerted by test scores – linked as it is to ample rhetoric, community pride, and some subsidies – has become the primary policy-making mechanism for pushing less-successful schools toward higher levels of achievement. This is a natural extension of a mechanism that has worked pretty well for minimums, but it is fraught with problems when thoughtfulness is the goal.

Thoughtfulness requires close reading and disciplined debate about what has been read. It requires substantial writing – not just narrative writing but argumentative, analytical, and evaluative writing that is then closely read, discussed, and rewritten. Thoughtfulness requires a great deal of time devoted to discussion – not just any discussion, but disciplined, Socratic dialogue. And thoughtfulness requires an open-endedness that few teachers dare encourage, because they would have to ask questions to which no one knows the answer or present problems to which there may be many possible solutions. Activities such as these can neither be promoted nor assessed with the conventional standardized, multiple-choice, machine-scorable tests that are used across the country for "policy-based testing."

Conventional policy-based testing – that is, testing in order to make policy decisions, monitor the effects of those decisions, track different groups of children, or insure that minimum standards are met – is the wrong kind of accountability tool for thoughtfulness. It makes people accountable only for the development of very low levels of knowledge and skill. Good schools and teachers tend not to pay much attention to these tests. As long as they are performing well, they feel free to experiment with more challenging modes of education.

But insecure teachers and schools under pressure to raise achievement levels blatantly teach to the tests. Since the tests require little thoughtfulness, the instruction and curriculum that revolve around them remain stuck at a very basic level. Under such circumstances, the demands of accountability intrude on teaching and learning time and warp instruction in ways that may often raise test scores even as they lower the quality of the education being delivered.

"Mr. Hoyt is teaching an inservice course to substitute teachers."

IF POLICY MAKERS are serious about wanting more thoughtfulness in the schools, they are going to have to help develop a different kind of system of accountability – one that promotes, assesses, and rewards constant change in the direction of greater thoughtfulness. Such states as Connecticut, California, Pennsylvania, and Michigan have already embarked on efforts to create assessments of critical thinking, more sophisticated writing skills, and higher-order thinking skills in science, mathematics, and reading. Some districts, such as Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Shoreham-Wading River (New York), have been trying to create assessments of thinking skills in various subject areas, in the hope that new kinds of tests will force new kinds of teaching. These are promising starts (though I would distinguish "thinking skills" from thoughtfulness), but they still leave us a long way from our goal.

Several barriers to the development of a different system of accountability loom large. To begin with, an accountability system for thoughtfulness will require widespread acceptance of descriptions of education that differ from those we now have. The images and metaphors we use to describe education will have to change. The system of instruction and the tests used to evaluate it, arising from the same view of teaching and learning, must change. Standardized, multiple-choice, norm-referenced, machine-scorable tests belong to a system of education that is managed in terms of goals, objectives, subobjectives, and statements of outcomes – a system that breaks the day into minuscule bits of time; that breaks the curriculum into thousands of tiny units to be taught and tested one at a time; that structures instruction to match the bell-shaped curve that lies behind norm-referenced tests; and that requires uniformly teaching and testing large groups of students. If we want an accountability system that will gather data for maintaining minimum standards without thwarting constructive growth and change, we will have to redesign the existing system.

Such wholesale restructuring has happened before. Testing as we know it today became a part of schooling at a time

when great demands were being placed on the educational system to absorb large numbers of people who had not previously sought schooling. A national need to sort people and a desire to do so "objectively" ran head-on into the long-established practice of "subjective" evaluation. Slowly but surely, subjectivity was driven to the margins. It did not fit the more modern, "scientific" concept of education, and it did not serve the needs of public policy at that time. Subjective evaluation was looked on as irrational, inefficient, inaccurate, and inadequate. Something similar – though perhaps less extreme – must happen to the current system of accountability if we are to make room for a more challenging and productive one.

A second obstacle to creating greater accountability for thoughtfulness is that the current approach is widely believed to serve bureaucratic and public relations needs. Whether or not it does so remains open to question, since there is evidence that those in the bureaucracy who might be expected to use test data may not be doing so.[8] In complex organizations, few decisions are made on the basis of any single indicator; instead, people tend to cite test data when they serve to confirm judgments and ignore them when they don't. But it is clear that standardized test data describe performance in a way that is easy for the public to grasp. This certainly serves the district well when the test scores are high or rising.

"What a day! The computers went down, and then so did the teachers."

Anyone who wishes to create an accountability system for thoughtfulness that will be as potent as the current system of accountability for basic achievement must come up with measures that are as simple and as easy to understand as test scores and that appear to be useful to the bureaucracy. This is a formidable challenge on both counts. Advocates of thoughtfulness are likely to push for multiple indicators of quality, while the bureaucracy and the public seem to prefer single, quantitative indicators. If the fight to replace standardized, multiple-choice tests of grammar and usage with writing samples is any gauge, then the battle to install more robust indicators will be long and hard-fought.

Advocates of thoughtfulness will also have to unscramble the current confusion about who is responsible for what. Today, the only people who can honestly take responsibility for test scores are the students themselves. Their teachers will not do so because they do not wish to be held responsible for what the students' homes might have done to influence achievement or for what the students' previous teachers might have done. Principals say that they should be held accountable for their performance as leaders and managers, not for the achievement of students they never face. School boards and superintendents say that they should be held accountable for the leadership and management tasks they were elected or hired to carry out. Yet everyone is ultimately held accountable for the same thing: student achievement, as measured by tests of basic skills.

This overuse of a single indicator enables some people to escape responsibility for poor job performance while others are denied praise for jobs well done under difficult circumstances. Moreover, it encourages people to believe that their job is to manipulate someone else into doing his or her job better, and so everyone winds up minding the business of everyone lower down in the hierarchy, and the entire weight of the bureaucracy falls on the teachers.

As formidable as these obstacles to installing a more robust system of accountability may be, they are not insuperable. A new vision of education is taking shape under the combined pressures of new economic forces and of old promises as yet unkept. Bureaucracies can and do change when their accumulated irrationalities render them unable to respond to public needs. Public opinion about what constitutes a valid measure of academic performance has changed in the past, and it will change again.

The best way to restore balance to a system that is too heavily tilted toward the basics would be to create a strong counterculture within the system that values inquiry and thoughtfulness above all else. Bureaucratic values and modes of operation tend to move into territory someone has abandoned or not yet claimed. Since we have not yet made a strong commitment to the proposition that *all* students can learn – and can learn a great deal more than they do today – we do not really know what our educational system can do. To the extent that we show it to be capable of doing much more than it now does, we will be held accountable for much more.

---

1. Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1986).

2. National Assessment of Educational Progress, *Reading, Thinking, and Writing* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1981); Rexford Brown, "Public Policy and Pupil Achievement," *State Legislatures*, October 1983, pp. 39-42; and Richard Venezky, *The Subtle Danger* (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1987).

3. E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); and Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).

4. Dolores Durkin, "What Classroom Observations Reveal About Reading Comprehension Instruction," *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 14, 1978-79, pp. 481-533; Arthur Applebee, *Writing in the Secondary School* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, Research Monograph No. 21, 1981); John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Dennis Palmer Wolf, "The Art of Questioning," *Journal of State Government*, March/April 1987, pp. 81-86; and Mortimer J. Adler, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1980).

5. Leigh Burstein, Eva Baker, and Pamela Aschbacher, *Using State Test Data for National Indicators of Education Quality: A Feasibility Study* (Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Evaluation, 1985).

6. Francis Schrag, "Thoughtfulness: Is High School the Place for Thinking?," *Newsletter*, National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, Spring 1987, pp. 2-4.

7. Eleanor Farrar, Arthur Powell, and David Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).

8. Leslie Salmon-Cox, "Teachers and Standardized Achievement Tests: What's Really Happening?," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1981, pp. 631-34; and Lee Sproull and David Zubrow, "Standardized Testing from the Administrative Perspective," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1981, pp. 628-31. K

Higher and Deeper Literacies:

Toward More Thoughtful Schools and Students

by Rexford Brown

It is not yet an educational "movement" because its adherents are marching under too many banners. It doesn't have a name or a slogan, and its argument has yet to be made as forceful and as compelling as it one day will. But there is something like a movement taking shape as people try to explain why the first wave of educational reforms must be superseded by a more thorough transformation of schooling in America. The common thread that runs through critique after critique is that this country needs to develop much higher levels of literacy in a broader range of students than ever before in American history. And that word *literacy* is being stretched to include such things as thinking skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking, higher order thinking skills, advanced reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, dispositions and attitudes, collaborative skills, commitment to democratic values, knowledge about how to keep learning, and knowledge about such subjects as science, computers, civics, and the culture at large.

We've come a long way from our grandparents' definition of literacy as the ability to write one's name. We are even moving quickly beyond definitions of literacy that sufficed only a decade ago. Possession of a sixth-grade education or of the "basics" or even of a high school or college diploma is no longer a sufficient indicator of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes many think will be necessary for the pursuit of public and private happiness and welfare in the 21st century.

At the Education Commission of the States, we have tried to put all these expanded definitions of literacy under the vague umbrella "higher literacies." Some have suggested that "deeper literacies" would be more accurate. The important point is that, in one way or another, what many governors, business leaders, economists, labor leaders, policy makers, and educators are saying is that they want to see more thoughtful students—thoughtful in the sense of reasoning better, better disposed to prefer thoughtful solutions to problems, and more caring about others and about their communities. Literacy, which used to denote a relationship with text, now refers to a quality of mind, a mode of engagement with the world that begins with text but goes far beyond it. Increasingly, this expanded notion of literacy is seen as a

REXFORD BROWN is director, Policy and Higher Literacies, a project of the Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado.

goal for all students, not just the college bound.

This expansion of the meaning of literacy and the broadening of the population for which it is applicable portends profound changes in schooling. Observational studies of schools over the last decade make it painfully clear that too many schools are not very thoughtful places nor are they environmentally conducive to the kinds of literacy we are talking about. Research has established that in most schools very little reading, writing or discussion takes place; we have asked for something very basic and we are getting something very basic. The question is: Can we get a higher or deeper or expanded kind of literacy from the current system?

The argument that we cannot rests on the assumption that we have institutionalized a number of beliefs about literacy, teaching, and learning that militate against any significant change. We have institutionalized the belief that I.Q. determines students' learning limits; that most young people do not particularly want to learn much and do not possess the intelligence to pursue more demanding studies; that reading and writing have more to do with decoding, encoding, and sounding out than they do with creating meaning, inquiring or constructing models of the world to aid our understanding of it; that we will never be able to afford truly individualized learning and will have to accept the limits of mass education—the transmission model of instruction with its passive students and endlessly lecturing teachers, a tracking and sorting system, and so on.

The assumption that these and other beliefs cannot be rooted out of the current system is unproven. It should be the primary focus of school literacy research for the next decade. Meanwhile, we can begin to try to understand the ways in which state and community policy have combined with educational theory to create and support the institutions we now have. State leaders interested in pursuing a second wave of reforms should be gathering evidence about the effects of the first wave. We need to know more about the effects of curricular mandates on a curriculum that is already too broad and too shallow. Can we promote thoughtfulness when teachers are anxious about "coverage"?

We need to know more about the effects of standardized multiple-choice tests. Do they signal an interest in thoughtfulness, or do they tell teacher and student alike that drill and rote learning take priority? Does our interest in insuring minimum levels of performance crowd out time to aim for maximums?

We need to know whether recent interest in better teacher training and higher certification requirements will bring us teachers who are better skilled at providing students with the kinds of open-ended activities that lead to thoughtfulness. And we need to know whether the ways money flows through the system encourage or discourage innovations that could lead to more thoughtfulness.

If policy makers want more thoughtful students, they will have to see to it that someone is accountable for thoughtfulness, that there is a curriculum for thoughtfulness, that thoughtfulness is evaluated appropriately, that teachers have the time and environment to be thoughtful themselves, and that there are ample incentives for thoughtfulness. Meanwhile, teachers, researchers, and others would do well to build a strong, coherent argument and find fewer banners under which to march. They need a constituency for thoughtfulness as powerful as current constituencies for equity or for the basics. They need a conceptual approach that includes attention to equity and to basic skills as well. They need to dramatize relentlessly the differences between what more and more people say they want out of schools and what schools are less and less likely to produce in their present form and with current policy. They need to highlight dysfunctions in the current system: Lecturing will not get us there; a fragmented, incoherent curriculum won't get us there; student passivity won't get us there; decontextualized learning won't get us there; minimums-oriented policies won't get us there.

Americans are practical people. When something is broken, they want to fix it. If the nation's needs have outstripped the marvelous educational institutions it created earlier in this century, then, as its dysfunctions become more and more apparent, Americans will try to fix it. Efforts to fix the school system are well under way around the country. Good will and good intentions abound. Proponents of greater thoughtfulness must take advantage of reform momentum to point out that what needs fixing is not our capacity to transmit the relatively low levels of literacy that sufficed half a century ago. What needs fixing is our capacity to be thoughtful about preparing more thoughtful students for a world that will desperately need them. EH

Publication Guidelines

educational HORIZONS

The Official Publication of
Pi Lambda Theta

Manuscripts for *educational Horizons* should be submitted in duplicate, typed, double spaced, not to exceed 20 pages in length. Length of article is not a determiner of publication potential. Include the title on page 1 to facilitate blind reviews.

Editorial Style

Editorial style is based on the most recent edition of [illegible] Style, The University of Chicago Press. Please follow this style for footnotes and bibliography. Bibliography should be listed at the end of the article and designated by superscripts within text. Include full names and titles of persons referred to in your manuscript. Spell out the names of all organizations the first time they are mentioned. Acronyms are acceptable thereafter.

Illustrations and Photographs

Illustrations and photographs pertinent to the article are welcome. Photographs should be black and white glossy. Credit will be given to the photographer when specified. Camera-ready copy for illustrations is welcome.

Biographical Information

A biographical note accompanies each published article. Please include:

1. present professional position of the author;
2. place of employment; and
3. previous professional experience pertinent to the authority of the article.

INCLUDE A SELF-ADDRESSED POSTPAID ENVELOPE FOR RETURN OF ALL MANUSCRIPTS THAT MAY NOT BE ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION

Mail to:
Editor
educational Horizons
4101 East Third St.
Bloomington, IN 47401
812-339-3411

Published Quarterly by the Education Commission of the States

State Education Leader

opinion

New policy dilemmas: Minimums versus visions

by Rexford Brown, ECS

One of the great challenges facing policy makers over the next decade lies in balancing productively two major policy activities: those that address the need for minimum levels of achievement and competence in the schools and those that aim to raise dramatically the productivity of the schools.

If both kinds of policy are not well harmonized, minimums-oriented policies may well conflict with or even torpedo loftier policy aspirations.

Both Policies Needed

The need for both kinds of policy is obvious. Public institutions must be held accountable for at least minimal levels of quality; the public deserves them and fairness demands them. At the same time, policy has a visionary dimension. It should encourage ever higher standards, promote excellence and challenge people and institutions constantly to improve.

In many fields, government's role is restricted to just the minimums, leaving vision and incentives to free market forces. In health, for instance, government action can minimize the number of rats in restaurant kitchens, leaving the Michelin Guide and other such incentives to inspire restaurateurs toward five-star performance. There is a balance.

Education does not take place in a free market. Educational minimums can be specified in politically manageable terms, and they can be measured. Maximums, however, defy consensus, and school policy is seen as weighted toward minimums. "Sure they *talk* about excellence," school people say, "but the rules and regulations and tests have nothing to do with excellence! They're all about minimum performance." The danger in such a system is that people will respond to the most concrete and direct policy influences on their lives, not to rhetoric: They will tend to perform minimally. Where little is expected, little will be found.

Of course, where schools are like restaurants with rats in the kitchen, minimums can improve performance. Even in schools a cut above the worst, the pressure and conversation about standards can trigger successful efforts to improve performance. But in most schools where performance is sluggish, minimums are beside the point. The danger is that too much attention to minimum requirements may depress energies and expectations.

There is some evidence and a lot of speculation that this has, in fact, happened in a number of places. Students have expected little of themselves. Teachers have expected little of students. Administrators have expected little of teachers, and the public has been satisfied with educational mediocrity.

To the degree that this has happened — to the degree that minimums-oriented policies are part of the problem with educational performance — minimums are not going to be part of the solution.

Far Higher Literacy Required

The nation has entered upon a "second wave" of reforms calling not for more basics or for more minimal standards, but for much higher levels of literacy than ever.

(continued on page 5)

Tests: 'serious limitations on educational possibilities'

by Vito Perrone

I recently visited a school where the conflicts were enormous over the need to write individual education plans for children who scored below a certain point on the mandatory standardized tests.

The involved special educator essentially took note of test areas in which particular children had not performed well. The prescription for each child was to devote time to those areas through direct instruction and focused skill sheets. For one child, the problem was syllabication.

The principal and the related teachers were contesting the entire procedure, but particularly the prescription. From their perspective, the fact that a child didn't know something, or how to do something in relation to a paper/pencil test, ought to bring forth a hypothesis where the results on the test could be corroborated in many more direct ways. They argued that syllabication had little connection to reading and that the child would be served better by opportunities to hear more language, to do more writing, to be read to, to find books closer to his or her natural inclinations than by any direct effort around syllabication.

While acknowledging that the prescribed exercises might improve the child's test score . . . , they believed such growth would likely leave the child in a worse place in relation to the overall goal of language competence. It is the kind of debate that is distracting teachers in that school and is not doing children very much good.

Testing Versus Goals

This happened in a remarkable school, serving mostly poor minority children extremely well. It is a school, however, in which the district's testing programs — reading tests, general achievement tests and locally developed curriculum tests — conflict with virtually all of the educational norms those in the school seek to foster. The tests have considerable power — scores are in the newspaper, and the district has made particular levels of gain on the tests a measure of its success, giving suggestions that higher scores demonstrate the schools are "effective," "turning around" and "getting better."

In the face of the increasing power of the tests, those in this school have found their own evaluation efforts being diminished.

This school is further exemplified by the thoughtfulness of its teachers and administrators in regard to evaluation issues. They protested a year ago the new citywide science test, arguing that it covered too much ground too superficially and didn't get close to what children actually knew and understood. Further, and as importantly, they contended that it didn't honor their slower, more intense, meaning-making, hands-on, observational approach to science teaching and learning.

Ultimately, using the district's objectives and the questions asked on the districtwide multiple-choice test, they devised an alternative test — a pilot study in science assessment. Almost everyone who examined the alternative assessment instrument liked it. But it hasn't replaced the citywide test.

Protesting the Test

The way the teachers and administrators approached the issue is reflected in the following background statement they included in the description of the alternative process:

(continued on page 5)

Policy dilemmas

(continued from page 4)

The argument for higher literacies was made most recently and most forcefully by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, which pointed out that basic skills and literacies appropriate for the routinized work of early 20th Century mass production are no longer sufficient.

The forum's report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, calls for "ability to reason and perform complex nonroutine intellectual tasks. . . ."; "people with an ability to see patterns of meaning when others see only confusion. . . ."; people with a "cultivated creativity. . . ."; people who know how to learn all the time and are imbued moreover "with a set of values that enable them to use their skills in the service of the highest goals of larger society." The schools, the Carnegie report asserts, "must graduate the vast majority of their students with achievement levels long thought possible for only the privileged few." This is a tall order. Fewer and fewer students have been exhibiting these higher literacy skills over the last decade, partly because schools have focused intently upon basics. Nor will the trend be easy to turn around.

Few classrooms are conducive to training in and practice of higher-order thinking skills. Teachers out-talk entire classrooms of students by a ratio of 12 to 1; extended discussion, writing and rewriting, debate and all of the many ways in which students might develop more sophisticated information processing skills are rare. When John Goodlad studied the matter, he found that even teachers who wanted to cultivate such skills in their students either did not know how or found themselves constrained by the structural conditions of teaching.

The higher literacies challenge requires policy makers to examine the full range of policy tools that have been used to promote education reform, to weed out minimums-based policies and programs that are barriers to progress toward much higher levels of literacy for much greater numbers of students and to invent "Michelin guide" policies that restore a proper balance of minimums and vision.

Testing and Accountability

The challenge poses some serious dilemmas for state and district testing programs. To begin with, if higher literacies instruction calls for more active learning, more critical thinking, more problem solving, more reading and discussion and extended writing, then it is clear that schools cannot assess these higher-order activities with the current standardized multiple-choice norm-referenced commercial tests so widely used to evaluate progress in the schools. The instruments used for accountability do not match the likely outcomes and forms of higher literacy instruction.

A second difficulty lies in the influence of testing on teaching. To the extent that the results of commercial, standardized tests are used to put pressure on schools, both teaching and curriculum tend to emphasize what can be tested in these simple formats. A learning environment centering around success on multiple-choice tests is not a learning environment conducive to instruction in higher literacies. The instruments of accountability do not match the teaching and curriculum necessary for higher literacies instruction.

Because of these and other potential problems, everyone interested in developing much higher levels of literacy in the classroom should ask about their accountability programs:

- Do tests and accountability demands intrude unduly on teaching and learning time?
- Do they promote "teaching to the test," narrowing emphasis to what can be tested quickly and inexpensively?
- Are testing and accountability data really used in ways that promote better learning?
- Do commercial, standardized, norm-referenced tests serve as models for teacher tests? If so, are they the right models for teachers aiming to promote higher literacies?
- Do current tests really match what teachers are trying to do in the classroom and what reformers believe will be required in tomorrow's classroom?
- Do testing and accountability data measure the most important things to know about schools during a period of intense change and innovation?
- Do accountability measures leave room for classroom, school or district experimentation?

There are grounds for believing that in many school systems the answers to these questions will be discouraging to anyone who wants to see higher literacies instruction flourish. Moreover, there is reason to fear that the situation will worsen with every advance toward greater individualization of diagnosis, instruction and learning.

The Alternatives

What, then, is a policy maker to do? Districts and states need a certain amount of data with which to evaluate education and make management decisions. The information should be uniform enough to permit evaluations across different systems and schools and it should not be unreasonably expensive. If current testing procedures are undercutting higher literacies goals, are schools left with no alternatives but extremely costly assessments and/or a return to a chaos of subjective tests that could never be aggregated for policy and management decisions?

There are several ways out of this dilemma. All require somewhat different assumptions about teaching and testing and learning and accountability. Some interesting ones:

- Move to a different set of indicators about student and school progress
- Develop higher-order literacy assessments
- Help teachers and districts to develop appropriate evaluation tools as they develop higher literacies curricula
- Develop accountability indicators for classrooms, schools, districts, the state and the public at large, each system appropriate to the audience and what it needs to do to do its job well

In coming issues of the **Leader** and in a series of publications stemming from the ECS Higher Literacies Project, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, we will pursue these questions and describe efforts around the country to resolve these policy dilemmas.

Rexford Brown is ECS director of communications and director of the ECS Higher Literacies Project. ●

Higher literacy requires major school changes

by Rexford Brown

School reform that will bring about much higher levels of literacy for more students will require major changes in schooling, a group of distinguished scholars and policy makers concluded at an ECS summer institute.

Meeting at the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies in Aspen, Colorado, as part of the ECS project on Policy and the Higher Literacies, participants expressed a wide range of hopes and concerns about state and local policies and how they might hinder or foster critical changes in schooling.

"We have got to be asking ourselves 'what for' throughout this period of change," said Donald Graves of the University of New Hampshire. "If we lose sight of why we're trying to develop more thoughtfulness in more students, we lose the whole ball game. These schools that are focusing all their energies on just raising test scores, and these schools that are adopting programs left and right, willy nilly, scare me. No one seems to be taking the time to adopt a long-term perspective and asking what it's all about."

Participants had numerous points of view about the "what for" of school reform.

- Far more students should be actively engaged in their learning. School environments encourage too much passivity and dependence in students, making it hard for young people to take responsibility for anything, including their educations.
- Students must be relentless inquirers. School and classroom conditions must promote, sustain and reward inquiry.
- All students — not just a privileged few — must be better at finding, defining and solving problems, not just as individuals but as members of groups and communities.
- All students must be better at thinking, thinking about thinking, reasoning, defining the underlying values and assumptions behind ideas and statements, problem solving and other higher-order thinking skills. This means that schools must be places where children see this going on. Many schools are not now conducive to thoughtfulness.
- All students should be able to use literacy to understand themselves, the social and economic conditions in which they live and the things they and their communities might do to improve their lot.

Nancy Hoffman of the University of Massachusetts and Harvard University urged major changes in the way students are taught. "If you want more public-spirited young people, you give them public service opportunities," she said. "If you want them to know more about the new workplace demands, then you get them out into the workplace or bring it into the school; if you want them to think critically about this society when they're out of school, you get them thinking critically about it while they're in school."

> ***"We have got to be asking ourselves 'what for' throughout this period of change. If we lose sight of why we're trying to develop more thoughtfulness in more students, we lose the whole ball game."***

Mixed messages

Bella Rosenberg of the American Federation of Teachers decried the mixed messages being received by middle-school teachers and principals. "On the one hand, they're being told to beef up the substance and get students ready for a more demanding high school curriculum," she said. "On the other hand, they're being told to downplay substance and attend to the emotional needs of early adolescence. Many middle schools have an agenda that's basically anti-intellectual."

Current trends in testing and accountability worried a number of participants. "As long as states continue to test low-order skills, teachers will continue to teach low-order skills more than they need to," said Judith Langer of Stanford University. "The trick is to come up with affordable tests that force everyone to do a lot more thinking."

Langer cited a teacher who told her students to "invent an animal" as a way to determine whether they understood organic systems. "These kinds of tests challenge kids and teachers alike," she said. "They have right and wrong components but they're open-ended at the same time."

Guitele Nicolescu of the Association for Community Based Education said that each school and community should take more responsibility for deciding what should be tested. "There's nothing wrong with testing per se," she said. "The issue is who will control the contents of the tests. Will it be people outside the community or people within the community?"

Undermining teaching

Matthew Lipman, director of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, also expressed concern about outside forces that deprive teachers of responsibilities. "We have to preserve the quality of craftsmanship and apprenticeship in teaching," he said. "As more and more external instruments and agencies assume functions that teachers are best able to perform, we're undermining the profession in our very efforts to shore it up."

Robert Schwartz, director of education policy for Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, reminded the group of the importance of basic skills testing in large urban districts and said it is not going to go away for a long time. "If you want to change the accountability system, you'll have to do it slowly and carefully," he said. "You'll really need to start a parallel one. When its usefulness is proven to policy makers, they'll start paying attention to it."

Another topic during the four-day conference was resistance to change. Michael Apple of the University of Wisconsin asked participants to reflect on the people who are cited as "resistors" in studies of school change. "The fact is that in any reform, the resistors outnumber everyone else," he said. "We have to ask ourselves who these people are and what they are defending when they either resist or don't take an interest in change. I think we'll find that most of them are defending hard-won gains in control over their space and time — things we don't want to see them lose, either."

Elitist agenda?

Other questions the group debated included whether or not a higher literacies agenda was elitist; whether the curriculum has shifted too far toward an emphasis on process and too far away from considerations of content; how to improve the management of urban school districts; potential federal roles in promoting higher literacy for more students; and the impact of state school improvement initiatives on higher literacies.

The Politics of Literacy institute was one of several planned for the ECS project. The discussion, debate and recommendations will be woven into briefing materials to be released this fall and a book to be released in the winter.

> ***"As long as states continue to test low-order skills, teachers will continue to teach low-order skills more than they need to."***

Brown directs the Policy and the Higher Literacies project. ●

book review

Another endangered literacy

***Cultural Literacy*, E.D. Hirsch Jr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 251 pp., $16.95**

by Rexford Brown

With *Cultural Literacy*, E.D. Hirsch Jr., a professor of English at the University of Virginia, joins a swelling chorus of critics concerned about the curriculum in American schools. Persuaded that schooling has too long been dominated by a "content-neutral conception of educational development" that dates from the time of Rousseau, Hirsch calls strenuously for attention to content.

"We have permitted school policies that have shrunk the body of information that Americans share," he writes, "and these policies have caused our national literacy to decline."

Literacy has declined, he believes, because it depends upon a shared body of cultural knowledge, a national vocabulary by which people can communicate about important matters. Americans do not share that knowledge or vocabulary, he asserts, because we have not taught it in our schools.

"My father used to write business letters that alluded to Shakespeare," he writes. "These allusions were effective for conveying complex messages to his associates because in his day business people could make some allusions with every expectation of being understood."

Not today. Because reading and writing have become "decoding" and "encoding" skills taught mechanically and with no relation to a core of cultural facts, ideas and values, students acquire a shallow kind of literacy. They are not skilled at understanding more complex, mature material.

The damage is particularly great, Hirsch believes, for disadvantaged students, who begin school already deprived of background knowledge about the larger culture.

"Cultural literacy constitutes the only sure avenue of opportunity for disadvantaged children, the only reliable way of combating the social determinism that now condemns them to remain in the same social and educational condition as their parents," Hirsch continues.

What, exactly, is this cultural literacy and how might schools promote it? Hirsch is very clear that it is *not* a core curriculum. The elements of cultural literacy can be gleaned from a wide variety of texts that have shaped the American consciousness and created our national language.

Because that language contains allusions to figures and events from the Bible, the Greeks, the Romans, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, American history or modern science, students need to know what the allusions mean when they come across them in their reading. This does not mean, however, that they must read *particular* books. "Almost any battle will do to gain a coherent idea of battles," Hirsch writes. "Any Shakespeare play will do to gain a schematic conception of Shakespeare."

The key to his approach — and one of the things that makes it controversial — is Hirsch's insistence that cultural literacy consists not in knowing books, but in knowing key words, names, dates, places, phrases, sayings and allusions that *come* from books.

"It should energize people to learn that only a few hundred pages of information stand between the literate and the illiterate, between dependence and autonomy," he writes. And then he provides a first draft of the list, about 5,000 items, which he proposes be taught in school like vocabulary is commonly taught — through memorization, drill and practice.

Some items on the list — agorophobia, AFL-CIO, Battle of Midway, Joe Louis, "not with a bang but a whimper," vulcanization. To those who will say such a list is dangerous in the hands of educators, Hirsch replies: "It's not the list that is dangerous to serious education, its explicitness is dangerous to the inadequate, skills-oriented education principles of the recent past."

Hirsch does policy makers service by calling into question any curriculum that separates "skills" — whether reading or writing or thinking — from substance. Students have to read and write and think *about* and with *a knowledge of* particulars. He makes an interesting case that in theory, at least, we can have cultural literacy and cultural pluralism at the same time without resorting to booklists that dominant social classes impose on subdominant groups. Students can have distinct class and ethnic identities, yet all speak the same language of our culture. His warning that school reformers must sooner or later confront the issue of the *contents* of literate education alerts us to the long row reformers have yet to hoe.

On the other hand, policy makers should be wary about Hirsch's proposed solutions, which are at once vague and simplistic. The last thing the reform movement needs is a round of state mandates for yet another kind of literacy.

Hirsch's theories should not be acted upon. They should be debated vigorously. His list should not be canonized. It should, however, encourage communities to argue about what they share and what they want their children to share.

Brown is ECS director of communications and director of the Policy and the Higher Literacies Project. ●

BEST COPY AVAILABLE